

**VISUAL ART, EXHIBITION, AND MUSICAL PERFORMANCE:
PERFORMING PALESTINIAN IDENTITIES IN EXILE**

By

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requirements for the degree of
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I declare that this thesis was composed by myself and that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Mona Marshy

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ABSTRACT

Both art and identity are constituted through institutional, transnational, transcultural, aesthetic, bodily, discursive and social processes. Individual subjectivities are given language, bodily expression, validation, and social force through artistic expression. Understanding aesthetic ‘languages’ and processes of art provides insight into the dislocation of Palestinians in the context of contested collective narratives and disrupted languages of signification. This thesis examines how works of visual art, musical performances, and exhibition contexts shape discourses of identity and experiences of belonging for artists and audiences.

Dispossessed of their ancestral homes and land, and dispersed throughout the world, Palestinians are removed from the historical places of memory that are central to the Palestinian national narrative. This dissertation examines works of art and performances by selected Palestinian artists living in the West (five in Canada, one in the United States, and one in England). The artists reflect a wide range of diaspora experiences and negotiations, and the study provides insight into ways in which individuals and communities regenerate, recreate, and re-member themselves out-of-place. I argue that the seven artists’ works of visual art and musical performance enact memory, Palestinian national narratives, cultural politics, postmemory, and belongings.

I also examine processes of exhibition, media representation, and cultural politics of a national museum exhibit in Canada, entitled *The Lands Within Me: Artistic Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin*, as a means of better understanding ways that institutional and representational contexts signify identities of art, artists, and audiences. The study demonstrates that art articulates as much with aesthetic styles and vocabularies as with transnational, transcultural, and historical forces. I argue that the works, performances, and exhibition processes enact identities and relations of power, and that at stake are boundaries of identity, as well as the geopolitics of multiculturalism and international relations.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Art and performance represent contestations, dialogues, and negotiations of *meaning* as well as of *power*. Narratives produced through and around works of art reflect, as well as challenge or widen, available spaces of discourse and subjectivity. In the words of Griselda Pollock, cultural practices “do a job which has major social significance in the articulation of meanings about the world, in the negotiation of social conflicts, in the production of social subjects” (Pollock 1988:7).

Art and performances engage with transnational processes and relations between subjects and places. Examining processes of art and aesthetic languages can deepen our understanding of the dislocation of subjects, and the disruption of collective narratives and visual languages of signification. Art occupies the interstices in which the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated (Bhabha 1994b:269). Art enables artists and audiences to create and redefine belonging. As Irit Rogoff rightly points out, the subtleties of negotiation and navigation that are part of the interplay between art, audience, performance sites, and exhibition processes enable “a possibility of redefining issues of location away from concrete coercions of belonging and not belonging determined by the state” (Rogoff 2000:4).

In this study I examine works of visual art, narratives, and performances by Palestinian artists in exile. I also examine exhibition and museum processes through which art and artists are signified. The works of art and performance reflect and create a range of aesthetic, individual and collective strategies. The art and performances nuance and inflect experiences and orders of belonging for artists and audiences. And they shape ways in which subjectivities, culture and place are experienced and enacted. They also serve, I argue, to relocate artists and audiences, and interpolate critical comment into dominant discourses. In this regard, the artists' works and performances move between aesthetic languages and forms, and between multiple modes of thought and expression.

The art I examine in this study, and the strategies and discourses with which they engage, take place in Canada, the United States and England—contexts in which Palestinian and Arab cultural forms are usually misunderstood and maligned, in the words of the late Edward Said (Said 1986:6-7). Speaking from his own positioning as a Palestinian who lived all of his adult life in the United States, Said described the predicament of Palestinians as follows,

Stateless, dispossessed, de-centered, we are frequently unable either to speak the 'truth' of our experience or to make it heard. We do not usually control the images that represent us; we have been confined to spaces designed to reduce or stunt us; and we have often been distorted by pressures and powers that have been too much for us. An additional problem is that our language, Arabic, is unfamiliar in the West and belongs to a tradition and civilization usually both misunderstood and maligned. Everything we write about ourselves, therefore, is an interpretive translation—of our language, our experience, our senses of self and others. But it is only through a recognition of these complexities that we can approach the elusive nature of identity, or integrate public and private realities, or apprehend that extraordinary variety of individuals and activities called Palestinian (Said 1986:6-7).

Since Said's statement, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have waged battles against Israeli military occupation that have served to open up spaces within the West for the Palestinian narrative.¹ At the same time, though, Israeli military occupation and colonization of Palestinian land and people has intensified. Palestinians living under Israeli military occupation are obliged to negotiate their future with their occupier. Since the signing of agreements between Israel and the Palestinian leadership in September of 1993, Palestinian national aspirations are negotiated within discourses and political economies of Western neoimperialism. The majority of Palestinians remain dispersed throughout the world. As a result, the strategic importance of asserting narratives of Palestinian national identity has not diminished, while the diversity of cultural influences that comprise Palestinian subjectivities and identities in exile increases.

Palestinians in exile integrate, represent and perform aspects of Palestinian identity and subjectivity in ways that are bound up in the perceived importance of retaining memories and collective aspirations in the face of the increasing colonization and destruction of the places associated with their personal and collective memories. As Pierre Nora notes, "we buttress our identities upon such bastions [of memory], but if

¹ Granted, mainstream media coverage of the Middle East in Canada reflects Orientalist polarizations of the West as "rational" and the East as "depraved." Media coverage has projected both sides of this polarization onto Palestinians. 'Good Palestinians' such as Hanan Ashrawi, a member and spokesperson of the Palestinian negotiating team during negotiations with Israel that led to the signing of the Oslo agreements, were contrasted with 'bad Palestinians' such as the "extremists," "fundamentalists," and anyone who opposed the agreements being signed at the time. The result is that there was little room to investigate possible negative implications of the agreements (Marshy 1993:72). More recently, Palestinians are described as "militants," whether or not they are civilians, and, of course, "terrorists" (with renewed connotations in the context of the American "war against terrorism").

what they defended were not threatened, there would be no need to build them” (Nora 1989:12).

Some 80 percent of the people who today identify themselves as Palestinians have never lived on the soil and in the “home” culture of Palestine. Additionally, as noted by sociologist Janet Abu-Lughod, “even the most assimilated who have established themselves professionally in their lands of adoption still retain...a gnawing sense of exile” (Abu-Lughod 1989:40, 42). This sense of exile infuses Palestinian art and literature. Quite poignantly, Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish writes, “Earth scrapes us, pressing us into the last narrow passage, we have to dismember ourselves to pass” (Jayyusi 1992:63).²

I argue in this study that art and performance by Palestinian artists in exile express attempts to re-place the dismemberment of individual and historical “passage,” with renewed engagements with the past and future. I explore how the content and form of the artists’ works and performances navigate and constitute belonging to places of memory that are central to Palestinian national and personal identities. At the same time, I propose that while a narrative of loss, dispossession and displacement is at the centre of constructions of Palestinian identity, artistic performances of this narrative reflect and constitute active, critical engagements with the conditions and terms of the present and future.

² Jayyusi cites Darwish’s “Earth Scrapes Us,” translated by Lena Jayyusi and Christopher Middleton in *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology*, edited by Salma Khadra Jayyusi. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

At the centre of the analysis are selected works of visual art by four artists, musical performances by three musicians, and a national exhibit in Canada that featured works by visual artists of Arab origin. The four visual artists and three musicians are Palestinian by origin, living in the West (primarily in Canada). Their visual art, plastic arts, installations, exhibition sites, and musical performances (more so than the form of the music itself) are examined for negotiations of identity. They are treated as subjective and critical enactments of difference and belonging. I do not consider their art or performances as Palestinian *per se*. Rather, the works and performances, along with artists' narratives and biographical trajectories are examined for insight into ways in which identities are performed. One of the musicians is also a dancer whose performances provide additional insight into embodied performance and its articulation with national and multicultural imperatives and constructs of identity.

I draw on (amongst other studies) Tina Sherwell's examination of visual art and popular vocabulary of Palestinian nationalism (Sherwell 2003), and on Bashir Makhoul's survey of artistic symbolism in paintings by Palestinians (Makhoul 1995). Sherwell and Makhoul illustrate how Palestine is reconstituted in representational practices. These practices, moreover, are a cornerstone in the formation of a Palestinian identity (Sherwell 2003:318). My interest has been to try to understand the work of the images within multicultural contexts, and the ways in which they serve to relocate and re-member artists and audiences to places of memory. The efficacy of the works is created through the imagery and its symbolism, as well as by places of exhibitions, discourses of identity and belonging, and audience engagements. My analysis focuses on the

performativity of the works—their efficacy in enacting identities and creating social spaces for individual and collective narratives.

Homi Bhabha argues that art “interrupt[s] the performance of the present” to create spaces of intervention that can reinscribe our “cultural contemporaneity” (Bhabha 1994a:7). An underlying research question concerns the efficacy of art and performance in effecting changes within wider social contexts. When and how are spaces of intervention created through art? The national museum exhibition of Canadian Arab art is examined to better understand ways in which exhibition and museum processes shape constructions of art and identity. Particular events and cultural politics surrounding the national exhibit are also examined as a means of understanding the institutional and discursive milieu within which Palestinian and Arab art and identities are signified in Canada.

Differences articulated through art and its performance and exhibition are not in themselves indicative of essential differences. Rather, they are strategic constructions and uses of difference. Similarly, symbols of ‘Palestinianness’ in the works and performances of the visual artists and musicians are not indicative of an essential Palestinian art or identity. Nonetheless, while art by Palestinian artists is not always identifiable from the visual vocabulary alone (this is particularly the case with artists working in various abstract genres), there are recurrent themes in artistic expression by Palestinian artists. These include dispossession, alienation, resistance, homeland, and national identity. These themes manifest in art and performance as strategic and critical comment.

My focus on markers of Palestinian identity within art forms and performances, then, is intended to highlight the critical, strategic, and efficacious aspects of art within aesthetic languages, and within discourses and relations of power. All Palestinians, including those who remained in their homes in Israel, share in the trauma that befell Palestinian society (as outlined in Chapter Two). Palestinians have all experienced either expulsion from their homes and homeland, being born stateless and without rights, or a stigmatised identity (Farsoun and Zacharia 1997:154).

The conditions and circumstances of their exile, importantly, are highly differentiated. Artists' works and performances, I argue, are vital indicators, as well as means of navigating, shared and individual disjunctures, displacements, and re-memberings. I concur with Araeen Rasheed, in that the "transgressive insight" created by the rupture of exile "empowers the individual, not only to compensate the loss but also to position him/herself critically in the world. The exiled subject therefore does not operate from a position of loss or as a victim, but from a position from which he/she can locate him/herself in the world as a free subject and change it" (Araeen 2000:8-9). There is a need, which this study attempts to address, to examine ways in which art represents means through which Palestinians create and enact their displacements, re-locations, and re-memberings in critical ways.

In this chapter, I outline the germination of the dissertation, the purpose and need for the study, and conceptual frameworks underpinning the research approach. I also note

the methodological approaches that inform the research and methods employed. I close with an outline of the structure of the dissertation as a whole.

1.1 Germination of the research

The following discussion aims to situate the set of questions I bring to this study of artistic expressions of Palestinian identity. My interest in art emerged, quite literally, in the ‘in between’ spaces of M.A. research on the more overtly political struggles of women activists in Palestine during the first intifada (between 1987 and 1993). Between interviews with activists during a four-month period in 1992, I spent time talking with new friends at Hakawati Theatre in Arab Jerusalem. Many of them are artists and writers and they relayed difficulties of being an artist in the charged context of Palestinian national struggle. Their art was often judged according to the dictates of whether it served the national cause or not: did it convey the battles of boys against armoured tanks on the streets? Did it memorialize the land of Palestine? I began interviewing the artists in order to better understand how individuals navigated contradictions of nation-building. One singer faced audiences that often wanted her and her band to perform works that were “more Palestinian with less ‘foreign’ influences.”³ A painter conveyed his motivation for using the materials he did—twigs from olive trees, soil—to re-member Palestinianness prior to and beyond the contemporary framework of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Other visual artists relayed how difficult it was to grow as artists as they could never show their best works at exhibits abroad as

³ Personal interview, Ramallah, July 1992.

they did not dare to risk having them confiscated by Israeli occupation authorities at the border crossing.⁴

It became clear that individual artists were actively navigating contradictions produced by the Israeli occupation as well as by the Palestinian national imperative for political, social, and narrative coherence. Notably, the national focus served to invigorate cultural productions, and contributed to the creation of an original and experimental cultural movement in Palestine (Mikhail-Ashrawi 1993:104). Individual artists' strivings to express their subjectivity within the national struggle had spatial dimensions: the singer who was frustrated by audience expectations to sing songs that were 'more Palestinian' eventually split her time between Paris and Ramallah. Collective strategies formed over the years: art galleries were opened up in Jerusalem and Ramallah to works by Palestinians, including those in the diaspora.

At the time of these discussions with artists, my own Canadian Palestinian identity was in constant flux. Flying to Palestine on my first trip 'back' to the place of my father's origin, I realised mid-flight that my identification as Canadian Palestinian was actually bifurcated: I felt politically Palestinian but culturally Canadian. Arrival in Palestine brought further distinctions of identity that I note here in order to illustrate the social divisions within Palestinian society as well as my navigation of boundaries that serve to define the meaning and experience of being Palestinian. Through the eyes of other

⁴ Personal interview, Ramallah, July 1992.

Palestinians, I became identified as ‘Canadian Palestinian,’ ‘Palestinian! Period!’⁵ a ‘’48 Palestinian’ (as my father’s family fled Palestine in 1948 rather than during the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, in 1967), ‘Christian Palestinian,’ ‘Western-raised Palestinian,’ a ‘returnee,’⁶ or ‘Palestinian from the ‘inside’’ (within Israel, as my father’s family is from Nazareth). Notably, other Palestinians never once identified me as ‘Arab Israeli,’ the term Israel uses for its Palestinian population.

Encounters with Israelis at military checkpoints and airports reflected back to me the feared enemy returning. Upon entering Israeli, I filled out the customs form, which included a space for my father’s Arabic name. This brought queries from Israeli customs officials about his place of birth, and sometimes inane conversations when I would reply “Nazareth” (these included a quiz about where Nazareth is located). Invariably, I would be ushered aside for the three or more hours of interrogation and intimidation (at airports) that is routine treatment for Palestinians at Israeli airports.⁷

⁵ When I described myself as *noos* (half) Palestinian, I was sometimes emphatically told that I was not ‘half’ Palestinian but ‘Palestinian!’ when it was learned that my Palestinian heritage was through my father and not my mother.

⁶ ‘Returnees’ is the term used in reference to Palestinians who, after working and raising families in North and South America, Europe, and elsewhere, often without having been able to return to Palestine since 1948, moved their lives and families to the West Bank and Gaza. This group included children whose facility with the Arabic language was poor, and who had grown up in a context that was culturally very different from the norms and expectations of Arab society. Because I was living and working in Nablus for the fixed length of my work contract, and as I was not living with my extended family, I was not a typical returnee. On the other hand, the bi-cultural contradictions that the returnee kids experienced echoed my own.

⁷ On one occasion, the interrogation caused me to miss my flight and resubmit to the entire process 24 hours later, after having to cross multiple checkpoints between Nablus and Tel Aviv through two consecutive sleepless nights, with only seconds to spare for me to board. As distressful as they were, my border crossing experiences are relatively very mild, given my Canadian passport, and compared to the notoriously horrific experiences of Palestinian refugees attempting to cross international borders as stateless individuals with what are called “laissez passez” papers.

The different identities mirrored back at me while in Palestine/Israel, and their deeply disorienting effect, were to provide a useful autobiographical reference for this study as I interviewed artists and tried to understand their border crossings in their narratives, works of visual art, and musical performance. I subsequently lived and worked in Nablus for two years, during a period when limited authority was transferred from the Israeli military to the then newly-elected Palestinian National Authority. Working for a Palestinian research institute, I could observe social and political developments and contradictions that arose from the Oslo agreements (in part as a result of the provision of the agreements for Israel to erect a more intensified and elaborate system of control of land and movement of people and goods). (Another interesting disjuncture I witnessed was the difference between developments on the ground and the reports received by my friends and family in Canada.)

At the time, Palestinians in North America and Europe were returning to Palestine, often with teenage children in tow who were born and raised in Western cultural milieus. An art teacher of some of these children recounted to me an anecdotal story about one girl's artistic expression of her different identities. In a painting, this student put into the same field of vision items that symbolized both her Palestinian and American identities. These comprised, among other items, a *kaffiya* (the black and white scarf that has come to symbolize the Palestinian cause) and a skull and crossbones, which represented the 'heavy metal' subculture she identified with and dressed in accordance to. I later saw the painting in a school exhibition.

What struck me were the responses that the painting engendered. Several classmates and some members of the student's family strongly disapproved of the mixing of identities that the imaging of symbols suggested. It appeared that her friends and family perceived the imaging of symbols of American culture alongside those of Palestinian culture as threatening to the integrity of Palestinian identity and subjectivity. On the other hand, the student's art illustrated, it seemed to me, her subjective attempts to create a melding of or dialogue between two seemingly disparate parts of her identity.

Such individual, artistic mixings of cultural influences reflect ways in which identities and belonging are imagined through images. Anthropologist Glenn Bowman has illustrated how, "the imaginings of Palestine by Palestinians located within the various sites of the diaspora... will differ substantially, and may lead Palestinians from one domain to see those from another as foreigners, or even as enemies" (Bowman 1994:142). While such dissonance, Bowman rightly notes, is common within established nations, the 'unfixity' of the concept of nation means that Palestinians living in one geographic and cultural milieu will draw lines of inclusion and exclusion that differ markedly from those at play amongst Palestinians in other places and circumstances (Bowman 1994:144). The differing battle lines means that Palestinians often do not perceive other Palestinians as 'like' themselves and, moreover, consider the efforts of other groups as undermining or threatening their own 'Palestinian' interests (Bowman 1994:147).

Bowman's thesis is illustrated in the work of ethnomusicologist Jennifer Ladkani.

Ladkani has shown how differing imaginings of Palestinian culture and identity play out

in the intense rivalry between a Palestinian *dabke* (dance) group ‘inside’ Palestinian (in Ramallah) and another ‘outside’ (in Amman) (Ladkani 2001:162-173). Interestingly, but perhaps not surprising, the Ramallah-based *dabke* group strongly supports the continual modification of its dance and music through the incorporation of ‘outside’ and ‘modern’ influences. On the other hand, the diaspora dance troop in Jordan argues for the strict adherence to what it perceives as authentic, pre-1948 dance steps and movements. Both groups deem their own approach as the most authentic and true to the spirit in which the dance is meant to be performed.

The different artistic forms and schools of thought that emerge in different locations of Palestinian diaspora are produced in part by the territorial and social discontiguity of Palestinian society. Schisms are further entrenched by a framework of negotiations that has marginalized millions of Palestinian refugees. Palestinian writer Fawaz Turki notes that,

The fact that they were not mentioned in the peace agreement, the shock of realising that they will never go home, will profoundly alter the way they see themselves and the world around them. While Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza will be engaged in nation building, Palestinians in the diaspora will lose much of their accustomed bearing. For years they will feel a loss too grievous to contemplate—and not only because, for the first time, they will no longer share a vision of the future with Palestinians who live on the Inside (Turki 1994:271).

This loss is of the concept, as separate from the fact, of *awda*, the return to home and homeland. Whether or not they would choose to return to Palestine/Israel is immaterial, argues Turki, but the need to believe in the possibility of return is “necessary to the lives of Palestinians in exile” (Turki 1994:271). Although, he also states, “We in the diaspora will learn to live with the new realities. We will even learn to live with our

memories...It was the world of our being that created the world of our memories. And once that world is changed, so will our selective use of memory” (Turki 1994:272).

More recently, Palestinian refugees have organized widespread campaigns in support of their right to return to their homeland. Nonetheless, Turki’s narrative points to some of the bearings of Palestinian subjectivity, and the use of memory in identifications and relocations—ontological, strategic, and individual. The questions I am left with in regards to this dissertation concern the role of art (for artists and audiences) in creating Palestinian subjectivities and identities in the West. For example, how do Palestinian artists’ biographical trajectories articulate with processes of art to create bearings between ‘home’ and places of exile for artists and audiences? Do visual art and musical performances by Palestinian artists in the West elaborate Palestinian nationalist discourse and establish a “set of equivalences” amongst Palestinians (Bowman 1994:145)? Additionally, do works of art and performance interpolate ‘Palestinian’ identities and political critiques in multicultural processes and dominant discourses in the West—in Canada, in particular?

1.2 Purpose of and need for the study

The dissertation contributes findings relevant to studies of processes of identity, subjectivity, nationalism and multiculturalism. The research is also relevant for those in the growing fields of postcolonial diaspora and transnational studies. Additionally, the study contributes to understandings of the interface between social marginality and the

role of art as a transformative, critical strategy. In this sense, the dissertation is situated within wider discussion of the nature of art and on the necessary conditions for its renewal—concerns that are on the agendas, for example, of artist-run centres in Canada.⁸

The study contributes understandings of the ways in which cultural and political processes are intertwined at several scales.⁹ Research was carried out at a time when Canadians were debating notions of diversity and multiculturalism. In this regard, the findings of the research contribute understanding of ways in which inclusivity and exclusivity are produced and contested in multicultural contexts. The study, I believe, reinforces the “growing conviction” that, in Bhabha’s words:

the affective experience of social marginality—as it emerges in non-canonical cultural forms—transforms our critical strategies. It forces us to confront the concept of culture outside *objets d’art* or beyond the canonization of the ‘idea’ of aesthetics, to engage with culture as an uneven, incomplete production of meaning and value, often composed of incommensurable demands and practices, produced in the act of social survival (Bhabha 1994:172).

In the aftermath of the attacks on the United States, on September 11, 2001, it is particularly important to examine art and aesthetics as more than ‘mere’ objects of art. Since the attacks in the United States, there has emerged a discourse that bifurcates ‘then’ and ‘now’ as well as ‘us’ and ‘them.’ As I write this dissertation in Ottawa, Canada, this discourse emphasises a polarization between those who are supposedly for

⁸ Such as that of MAI (Montréal, arts interculturels), an intercultural art gallery and theatre space.

⁹ The notion that culture and politics are exclusive categories continues to affect the ways in which academic projects are conceived and supported. For example, anthropologist Ted Swedenburg reports that in his experience with Joan Mandell of seeking funding for a film on the uses of the Palestinian *kuffiya* (black and white scarf worn around the shoulders), foundations that support ‘cultural’ projects found the Palestinian subject too dangerous or

civilization, freedom, and democracy, and those who are apparently against these. One effect has included the obscuring of historical and political contexts of the Middle East.¹⁰ Another is an increased charge around expressions of Arab culture and identity. Jayce Salloum, a Canadian born artist of Lebanese origin (whose work is discussed in Chapter Four) noted, “Being identified as an Arab now [since September 11th, 2001] has the same repercussions as before except they are heightened” with the “repulsion and exoticism of the ‘Arab’ subject” persisting (Salloum 2001). Salloum notes that,

In the current climate of suppression and repression of debate and dissention, discursive activities such that art can be, may be one of the few domains left for us to express unpopular ideas, resistance, and the complexities of our lives and the lives of those we choose to identify with. We need to protect our right to be self-inscribed (Salloum 2001).

Art and performance can potentially recast or dissolve binaries of ‘self’ and ‘other’ and of ‘here’ and ‘there.’ In the process, new belonging for artists and audiences are forged that challenge essentialist conceptions of identity. Knowledge of ways in which artists and audiences negotiate belonging can, also, provide important insight into the various accommodations that will be necessary in Palestine, if it is to incorporate the varied subjectivities of Palestinians in diaspora.

controversial. On the other hand, those that back ‘progressive’ films regarded their ‘cultural’ approach as frivolous (Swedenburgh 1995a:35).

¹⁰ As Robert Fisk, journalist for the *Independent*, stated, “So it has come to this. The entire modern history of the Middle East—the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Balfour declaration, Lawrence of Arabia’s lies, the Arab revolt, the foundation of the state of Israel, four Arab-Israeli wars and the thirty-four years of Israel’s brutal occupation of Arab land—all erased within hours as those who claim to represent a crushed, humiliated population struck back with the wickedness and awesome cruelty of a doomed people” (Fisk 2001:7).

1.3 Conceptualising art, identity, and belonging

In this research I move away from traditional art history approaches that rest on the notion that artistic expression can be viewed as autonomous from the socio-cultural, economic and political contexts in which it is produced and signified. Indeed, because art is no longer seen to be autonomous to the social world, it is increasingly considered as a useful interlocutor in examining the ways in which identity is constituted and fragmented. Irit Rogoff convincingly argues:

It is precisely because art no longer occupies a position of being transcendent to the world and its woes nor a mirror that reflects back some external set of material conditions, that art has become such a useful interlocutor in engaging with the concept of geography, in trying to unravel how geography as an epistemic structure and its signifying practices shape and structure not just national and economic relations but also identity constitution and identity fragmentation (Rogoff 2000:5).

The works, the exhibition, and the musical performances examined in, respectively, Chapters Three, Four, and Five are conceived as cultural products, embedded in thought and reflection, and in stories and conversations connected to events that occurred at certain places, during particular times and involving certain persons (Fabian 1996:219). Both art and identity are processes that involve narrative ideas or modes of thought (Geertz 1983:119-20). Further, narratives of translocation and position are useful ways of conceiving of identity (cf. Anthias 2002 and Somers 1994). Sociologist Floya Anthias argues that narratives of location and positionality enable “a complete abandonment of the residual elements of essentializing retained even within the idea of fragmented and multiple identities so favoured by critics of unitary notions of identity” (Anthias 2002:495).

Art is examined in this study as expressions of modes of thought and subjectivity that are given meaning through aesthetic languages as well as through institutional and wider social processes and discourses. Sculptor and former anthropologist Richard Nonas provides a very compelling definition of art. Nonas suggests that, “Art is the continual reweaving of outside hope into inside doubt... Art is culture’s strongest acknowledgement of an incalculably important social bond, a bond of shared unease” (Nonas 1994:165). Nonas suggests that,

Art exists everywhere because it is the most direct institutionalised way out for both artist and audience and, thus, by extension, for society itself—a safe and available way out from the immediate ideological, intellectual, psychological, and linguistic structure of culture. Art is a way out of each culture’s narrow surety of the way the world is and must be—the very surety that all culture exists to enforce. It is a way out of the predictability...of the culturally defined categories that art challenges yet inevitably (and even intentionally) goes on to reinforce. Art is always that shaky and fallible *transaction* by which we ambiguously acknowledge an outside, then pull ourselves back to safety again (Nonas 1994:165-66, emphasis in original).

Clifford Geertz identifies a commonality found in various art forms in that they are “specifically designed to demonstrate that ideas are visible, audible, and—one needs to make up a word here—tactile that they can be cast in forms where the sense, and through the senses the emotions, can reflectively address them” (Geertz 1983:119-20). At the same time, art consists of the crises it goes through within its institutional setting and historical positionality. Rajchman notes that art is “self-analytic” in that it:

consists of the crises it goes through, that it is punctuated by moments of breakthrough or ‘revelation,’ which require that one question one’s conception of who one is or how one has invested oneself in it. It is to say that a work is constituted through those events that arrest the self-evidence of one’s identity and that open other possibilities that retroactively reinterpret it (de Duve 1991:xvi).

These conceptions of art are critical to the study as they consider works of art and performances as sources of modes of thought and cultural knowledge.

Art and performance:

As mentioned, the approach to research recognises that visual art, music, and dance articulate as much with artistic vocabularies and styles as with transnational, transcultural and historical relations of power. For example, art's unease takes on additional significance in exile and, for Palestinians, in the absence of a homogenising mythology. The meaning and efficacy of works of art and performance are contingent on a complex, dynamic, and transcultural map of exchanges. Various actors create their meaning. They also reflect and shape battle lines that erect boundaries of culture and identity, through notions such as authenticity. An important question in analyses of both literary and artistic works, and one that underlies this research, is "how a narrative emerges and gains form—who or what enables it to be spoken, and who or what guarantees its truth. A narrative, like language, cannot be created in isolation" (Hoffman 2000:16). Indeed, cultures can be characterised by the narrative models they make available for describing the course of a life (Hoffman 2000:3).

Art is signified through (and constitutes) narratives, media representations, exhibition texts, institutional contexts, and cultural politics. The aesthetics of art, then, are integral to the social context in which they are performed (Rose 2001:15).

At the same time, Gillian Rose rightly cautions that works of art and images cannot be reduced to their context and must, rather, be examined in their own right and in regard to "their own effects" (Rose 2001:15, 37). In critical visual methodologies, the content, colour, spatial organization, and "expressive content" are all important indicators of an image's visual impact and effects on a spectator (Rose 2001:37, 52). Mieke Bal

suggests that all paintings, for example, have a range of viewers who are addressed, implied and represented to produce “a specific relation between image and spectator” (Bal 1991: 158-60; quoted in Rose 2001:45). The study also considers the ‘self-analysis’ of art works (Bal 1996), and is informed by critical works in cultural studies, anthropology, and feminist theory that epistemologically and methodologically attempt to overcome the ‘othering’ of objects of their study (Fabian 1996, Bal 1996; Code 1991).

Such works are less *about* their object of study than they are attempts to “reckon *with* it” (Bal 1996:169). The research interweaves the specific with the general, the particular of genres and uses of imagery and symbolism, with the broad historical and spatial changes in their meaning and context. Similarly, the individual and the national are not distinct entities but mutually constitutive. Imagery, music, and artistic form, like dance, reflect artists’ engagements with discourses, genres, and anticipated audiences. Differences are reflected or rendered invisible in works and performances, in ways that invest meaning and power in the art (Rose 2001:10).

Within this framework, and in different ways with regard to visual art and musical performance, I focus on the artists’ and art works’ navigation of tensions between individuality, social differences, and collective identifications. I examine how each is invoked and given artistic form and force. I also examine the subtle negotiations evidenced in the works themselves, in artists’ and audience narratives, and in the material and discursive spaces of particular exhibitions, performances, and critical reviews. The efficacy of art, then, is not presumed to be intrinsic to the work of art, but

the result of “the work performed by the image in the life of culture” (Bryson, et al. 1994:xvi; referenced in Rose 2001:47).

Finally, art works, performance, and exhibition processes provide an important “model for the difficulty of grasping and fixing meaning” (Bal 1996:281). It is my hope that this research, as part of the endless chain of interpretation and deferred meanings engendered by the works and performances (Hall 1997:42), can contribute understandings of processes—and imperatives—of art and identifications.

Art and narrative:

How images and words relate to each other has been a perennial problem in the interpretation of narrative painting (Fabian 1996:219). The problem includes the relationship between the written word and visual images, the spoken word and painting, and between paintings, texts included therein, and interpretations or discourses. Images, symbols, colours, tone, and anticipated audience are part of what enacts a narrative, along with how an exhibit is advertised, organized, and physically structured. Through the process of research, artists contribute to the meaning of their works in interviews, sometimes while walking through their own exhibits and narrating its meaning.

In textual analysis of written works, each literary work is a vision of a moment, says Said, and as such needs to be juxtaposed with various revisions it later provoked (Said 1993:67). While it is important to be mindful of the distinctions between art works and texts, both are part of intersubjective significations that enable a mapping of subjects in relation to knowledge production. Art works suggest, challenge and sometimes arrest

narratives that circulate around them. I draw on philosopher Lorraine Code's notion of narrative as epistemologically central to knowledge creation. Code argues that knowledge is not achieved at once, but develops through processes of intersubjectivity, and enables a mapping of subjects in relation to knowledge production (Code 1991:31,170; see also Bal 1996:174). Narratives in artists' interviews, media representations, imagery in works of art, exhibition processes, and textual renderings are examined in relation to each other and presented as epistemological resources.

Identity and belonging:

Identity is always historically and spatially contingent and provisional. I use the term "identification" as well as "identity" to convey individuals' provisional self-positioning within multiple networks and discourses. There is a tendency to view identity as constructed by what are assumed to be homogenous national attributes. What is important to keep in mind in exploring the identifications and identity enactments of artists and audiences, according to Paul du Gay, is that "forms of persons" should not be split from their institutional and social settings. Examinations of individuals' identities need to be contextualized, historicized, and particularised within immediate circumstances (du Gay 2000:282).

Amongst Palestinians in exile, there is no definitive or common 'Palestinian' identity or experience of 'exile' amongst Palestinians living outside of historic Palestine. The intent, herein, is not to prove the Palestinianness or Arabness of the art or the artists; as Jantjes notes, "European artists are never called upon to prove their Europeanness or to

demonstrate their closeness to their cultural roots" (Jantjes 1993:53). There are, nonetheless, historical experiences that are shared by Palestinians and not by other Arabs (primary amongst these is the 1948 *nakba*, meaning, catastrophe, the term Palestinians use in reference to their dispossession from their homes and exile from their lands upon the creation of the state of Israel). The meaning of this shared history, for Palestinians, is produced largely through memory and expressions of memory. The artistic expressions and performances of memory by the artists attest, indeed, to the fallacy of "the notion that there is an immutable link between cultures, people, or identities and specific places" (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996:1).

Rashid Khalidi, a leading Palestinian intellectual in the U.S., notes that "if one takes identity as the answer to the question, 'Who are you?' it is clear that the response of the inhabitants of Palestine has changed considerably over time" (Khalidi 1997:viii). The late Edward Said, the most well known Palestinian intellectual in the West, also noted the instability wrought by the passage of time on questions of Palestinian identity:

The further we get from the Palestine of our past, the more precarious our status, the more disrupted our being, the more intermittent our presence. When did we become a people? When did we stop being one? Or are we in the process of becoming one? What do those big questions have to do with our intimate relationships with each other and with others? (Said 1994:108).

In addition to the challenge posed by the passage of time, questions of Palestinian identity emerge in the absence of a state that could lend narrative authority to a unified founding myth and Palestinian collective existence. Palestinian artists, like Palestinians in general, are not yet in a postcolonial situation. Hence, 'married' to the battle over land in Palestine is an intense battle over competing national narratives. That is, contestations over land are waged within contestations of narratives. Referring in

particular to the Western empires of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Said notes “...when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future-these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative” (Said 1993:xiii). Today, as Said rightly notes, none of us is outside or beyond geography, or the struggle over geography, which is essentially a struggle about ideas, forms, images and imaginings (Said 1993:7).

In the dominant discourses in the West there is a denial of legitimacy with regard to Palestinian historical experience of expulsion from Palestine, colonization and military occupation. The dominant narratives of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict include the notion that an historical, immutable conflict has existed through the ages and, hence, no modern solution will be entirely successful. The myth of ‘a land without a people for a people without a land’ continues to have currency and to obfuscate Palestinian historical narratives. As Said has noted, “in the general political economy of memory and recollections that exists in public culture in the West, there is no room for the Palestinian experience of loss” (Said 1994:95-96). This lack of space for the Palestinian narrative is reinforced by representations in Western media of Palestinians as terrorists with a ‘cultural’ propensity toward violence and a ‘hatred of Jews’ since time immemorial. There is, arguably, a direct continuity between classical Orientalism and Western imperialism in the Islamic world and elsewhere, and between Israeli Orientalism and imperialism in the occupied territories (Said and Barsamian 1994:95-96).

The result is a negation of any coherence to Palestinians' individual and collective narratives. In his *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie asks Said whether it becomes tiring having to repeat the same story again and again. Said replies that:

It does, but you do it anyway. It is like trying to find the magical moment when everything starts [...] But it is very hard to do that because you have to work out everything and get past a lot of questions in the daily press about why Palestinians don't just stay where they are and stop causing trouble. That immediately launches you into a tremendous harangue, as you explain to people: 'My mother was born in Nazareth, my father was born in Jerusalem...' The interesting thing is that there seems to be nothing in the world which sustains the story: unless you go on telling it, it will just drop and disappear (Rushdie 1991:178).

Palestinians have continued the 'telling' of national narratives and identities through literature, theatre, film, painting, dance and folklore from various places of diaspora. The form and content of their art articulates with both material and ideological contestations to the idea of a Palestinian national narrative and heritage.¹¹ Artistic expressions can represent forms of telling that challenge dominant discourses. I argue in this study that art connects the unspeakable to wider social and political contexts, and represents an untapped source of understanding ways that individuals re-member themselves to individual and collective histories.

This dissertation attempts to contribute understandings of ways in which art, memory and place come into play in Palestinian artists' creative expressions—and the subjectivities and belongings that are created in the process. Like identity, belonging is conceived here as a process. As Vicky Bell notes, "one does not simply or ontologically

¹¹ The famously decorative embroidery on the dresses worn by Palestinian women has toured in Israeli exhibits as 'traditional Israeli handiwork.' The floor length dresses were available to shoppers, in the year after the Six Day War in 1967, in New York boutiques, in altered versions

‘belong’ to the world or to any group within it. Belonging is an achievement at several levels of abstraction” (Bell 1999:3). Until recently discussion of belonging has largely centred on the power of the state to grant, police and prevent rights of belonging or conditions of expulsion (see Rogoff 2000:5). This study foregrounds artists’ and audiences’ active negotiation of belonging through art and performance.

Memory:

Memory and, specifically, taking on the burden of memory, plays an important role in reproducing Palestinian identity in exile. Jean Said Makdisi, a Palestinian writer living in Beirut, writes “To have been born in Palestine means to be bound to a memory and to a sense of loss” (Makdisi 1990:32). Makdisi tells how her father’s recounting of his childhood memories represented a passing on of the burden of identity: “...in passing his memories on to me, he passed also the burden of memory, central to the Palestinian experience” (Makdisi 1990:40). Memory is understood here as a response to and a symptom of a rupture or absence as well as a substitute or surrogate for something that is missing (Bardenstein, 1999:148).

Memory, then, is more than the content of what is remembered. It is integral to the fraught nature of representation, and touches “very significantly upon questions of identity, of nationalism, of power and authority” (Said 1999b:4). Memory is a “field of activity” that selects, reconstructs, maintains, modifies and endows the past with political meaning. Memories can invoke narratives of the collective, national past,

to suit the mini-skirt fashion of the time and with “Made in Israel” labels sewn inside (Bushnaq

shaping notions of what ‘we’ and ‘they’ are” (Said 1999b:5). Indeed, memory and its representation are directly linked to questions of subjectivity, nationalism, power, and authority, and to the consolidating or constructing of group or national identities (Said, 1999a; Swedenberg 1995b). Memory is also a site of hegemonic struggle within nations, where differences play out between dominant and subordinate groups (Swedenburg 1995b:xxix). The transnational nature of memory, as Swedenberg (1995b) points out, is largely ignored. This is particularly relevant to the Palestinian situation, in which memory articulates with local and global scales. Indeed, the political economy of memory-making ebbs and flows with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.¹²

The growing literature on memory reflects the importance that memory has assumed in contemporary culture and cultural politics. The artistic expression of memory remains a powerful avenue of engagement for artist and audience alike, in part because invention is necessary for recollection to occur (Said 1999b:10). Memory is refracted and reconstituted through works of art and performance.

Anthropologists Paul Antze and Michael Lambek rightly note that “acts of remembering often take on performative meaning within a charged field of contested moral and political claims” (Antze and Lambek 1996a:vii). In this literature, memory is

1991:121).

¹² For example, anthropologist Jack Kugelmass notes that rituals of memory intensify with the public perception of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: “As long as Israel was perceived as a David against Goliath, there was no need for a ritual to convince participants and spectators of its vulnerability. But with the increasing perception of Israel as Goliath—the use of stones by Palestinians is also a rhetorical strategy—there is increasing need for Jews to formulate a counter-rhetoric of remembered victimization. Moreover, this strategy did not arise spontaneously among North American Jewry, but has had the active support of Israeli and American Zionist organizations, [and] the typical conclusion of...touring Israel” (Kugelmass 1996:205).

seen as a signifying practice, an index of identity, part of moral discourses “taken up by individuals and groups, often unself-consciously, as a means to articulate, legitimate, and even constitute their selfhood and relationships to others” (Antze and Lambek 1996a:viii). Certainly, individual memory depends for its articulation on the social groups to which the memories belong, as Maurice Halbwachs notes (Halbwachs 1992: 52-53). With the disappearance of the social *milieu* of memory, and the increasing isolation of the nuclear family, greater onus is placed on the individual body “to serve as the sole site of memory” (Antze and Lambek 1996a:viii). Memory implies identity, as Antze and Lambek point out, “the self caught between its roles as subject and object of memory, the telling and the told” (Antze and Lambek 1996b:xix).

It is useful to distinguish between memory and remembrance, where the latter is akin to a build-up of images that comprise official history (Marks 2000:64). Art performs subjectivities and identities, then, *through* both remembrance as well as memories that reside beyond words or shared modes of thought. Film theorist Laura Marks has suggested, in relation to intercultural cinema, that “processes of reconnecting experience with the social is often traumatic” (Marks 2000:64). The works of art and performance featured in this study serve to “reconnect” artists’ and audiences’ experiences, memories, narratives, and social *milieux*. I refer to this reconnecting work of art as *re-membering*. The hyphen is meant to emphasize, also, the negotiation of subjectivity in relation to various communities of belonging. As such, artists’ works and performances draw on and create rememberings that effect personal and social re-memberings.

Memory, in fact, needs cultural vehicles for expression (Antze and Lambek 1996b:xvii). Spaces of art and performance serve to create different memory practices that draw on one another in complex exchanges of metaphor and power. Works of art and performance provide a way of examining memory not as an unmediated natural process but as social invocations and deployments of memory and silences. Identity is not comprised of a fixed set of memories but lies in the dialectic of remembering and forgetting (Antze and Lambek 1996b:xxix). Like Mahmoud Darwish's account of one day during the siege of Beirut in 1982, entitled *Memory for Forgetfulness*, the forgetting of memory, in the form of art and performance, can itself become witness against the ravages of history and forgetfulness (Muhawi 1995:xix).

Given the centrality of the oral tradition in Arab culture, it is understandable that, as artist Kamal Boullata notes, Palestinian collective memory has been exalted more through oral than visual means. The poet, more than the image maker, has the power to move "the Palestinian soul" (Boullata 1993:68). Nonetheless, visual culture has played an important role in articulating Palestinian visions of both the past and the future. Visual imagery also references and elaborates other oral forms of expression. The musicality of the language, calligraphy, literary imagery, and the importance of words as sources of meaning infuse all forms of art by Palestinians (this link is explored in more detail in Chapters Two and Three). Artistic creations of the first generation of Palestinians who were displaced and dispossessed were a direct response to the loss of "home" as well as of "self."

Marianne Hirsch notes that memory is necessarily an act of recall, as well as of mourning (Hirsch 1998: 420). Palestinians born after the *nakba* attempt to re-member themselves to their pasts and future through their parents' traumatic rupture. In different and changing ways, artistic form and content constitute belonging to various places and imperatives to re-member, rebuild, replace and repair collective loss. Palestinians born after 1948 experience memories of Palestine through stories and narratives passed on from older generations. I refer to these as postmemories, borrowing Hirsch's term and drawing on her analysis of memory in the experiences of children of parents who have survived trauma. Postmemory is a particular mixture of mourning and re-creation of a place and time that was experienced by one's parents and ancestors and not by oneself. It is shaped by a sense of belatedness and disconnection (Hirsch 1996: 429, 422).

Hirsch's study of children of Holocaust survivors illustrates how their postmemories serve to create an exile identity from a world they have never lived and that has ceased to exist. Moreover, postmemory reflects "a different desire, at once more powerful and more conflicted: the need not just to feel and to know [their parents' world before it was destroyed], but also to re-member, to re-build, to re-incarnate, to replace and to repair..." (Hirsch 1998: 420).

Images of the *nakba*, for example, reflect and create expressions of loss and memory. But they also represent critical engagements with the conditions of the present and future. This engagement draws on the amorphous natures of memory, art, and the negotiation of public and narrative spaces. Pierre Nora insightfully notes that "[t]here are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*," real environments of memory (Nora 1989:15). This is relevant to

Palestinians, regardless of whether they reside on land that was part of historic Palestine. Places of memory as well as the social contexts of these memories have largely been eroded, besieged, or destroyed. Maurice Halbwachs, the theorist of collective memory, wrote in a posthumously published work:

...To the extent that the dead retreat into the past, this is not because the material measure of time that separates them from us lengthens; it is because nothing remains of the group in which they passed their lives, and which needed to name them, that their names slowly become obliterated.... A person who alone remembers what others do not resembles someone who sees what others do not see. He is in certain respects like a person suffering from hallucinations who leaves the disagreeable impression among those around him. As his society becomes impatient he keeps quiet, and because he cannot express himself freely, he forgets the names that are no longer used by those around him" (Halbwachs 1992:73-74).

Art, for some of these artists, I contend, is a mediation between forgetfulness and witness. The silences alluded to by the musicians and in some of the works of visual art, the song lyrics not composed or sung, reveal as much as that which finds artistic expression. They reveal also, as mentioned, the negotiation of narrative presence. The following section outlines the methods I use in examining both the content as well as the places and contexts of works and performances by Palestinian artists in Canada.

1.4 Methods and methodological approaches

The initial scope of this dissertation was to include visual art by Palestinians in Palestine, Canada, Britain, and possibly France. My aim was to compare visual art by Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza with that created by Palestinians in Western diasporas. Time as well as resource constraints made themselves felt during the first couple of months of fieldwork in Canada. I had scheduled two months for

fieldwork in Canada on Palestinian artists. I soon realised that the process of finding, contacting, scheduling, travelling to, and interviewing artists in different regions of the country, as well as viewing their exhibits, following developments in their career, and conducting follow-up interviews would take several months.

The study quickly grew into its current form. The focus is on three areas of art: visual art, exhibition and museum contexts, and musical performance. The analysis of visual art centres on works by four artists (as mentioned above, two of the artists live in Canada, one lives in the United States and another in England). Issues of representation and exhibition processes are the second focus of the dissertation and these processes are examined by way of a Canadian national exhibit of Canadian Arab artists. Thirdly, examining musical performances by three musicians of Palestinian origin living in Canada provides additional texture to ways in which art performs identities. I use the term 'Palestinian artist' and 'artist of Palestinian origin' interchangeably.

As is apparent in the following discussion, the approaches taken in examining the three areas of art and identity are different methodologically, interpretively, and in terms of the forms of evidence I draw on. This difference stems from each chapter's unique focus. Chapter Three, featuring works by four Palestinian visual artists, builds on the preceding historical analysis of the political and discursive context of art in Palestine. Chapter Three invites the reader into the form and content of works of art and situates these within the framework of Palestinian national aspirations. The works of art are reproduced within the text, as visual data and to extend the interpretive scope of the works themselves beyond, that is, my own necessarily partial rendering. In examining

the visual art of Palestinian painters, I look at the meanings ascribed by artists, viewers, exhibition sites, and critical reviews for clues as to how the art elaborates Palestinian national identity and individual belonging.

In Chapter Four, works of art featured in the exhibit, *Lands Within Me*, are also presented as visual evidence. The focus of that chapter, though, is on the museum and exhibition processes and media representations that discursively construct the meaning of the works. Discourses of Canadian multiculturalism and the cultural politics that arose around the exhibit form part of this context that serves to constitute the meaning and efficacy of the works. Chapter Four, then, brings the reader closer to the Canadian discursive context that shapes the efficacy of works by Palestinian and Arab artists.

The approach taken in Chapter Five reflects that section's focus on musical performance and dance and, more specifically, on three artists' performance strategies. That chapter draws primarily on discussions and interviews with the musicians and audience members. The terrain of identity construction examined is one that is more rarefied and contingent on the more fleeting exchange that takes place in performance between musicians and audiences. As explained below, the musical scores or audio recordings are not presented as evidence in the study, and images of performance sites are not included. While these would potentially enrich the discussion, the focus instead is on musicians' and audiences' creation of identity through ascribing various meanings and playing with terrains of difference in the exchange of performance.

Visual Art:

I chose methodologies and methods that could aid in illustrating the interconnection between the form and content of works, narratives of identity, and material contexts of artists' and viewers' engagements with the works. Similarly, the images reproduced in the chapter were chosen on the basis that they illustrate 'crossings' or fault lines between symbols, enactments, and places of identity. The images, admittedly, are not meant to be representative of the wide spectrum of works by each artist. Indeed, images I did *not* select are equally compelling, and would lead to different insights and analyses that would be no less interesting. Nonetheless, my rationale for selecting the images remains, I believe, valid in a study that aims to analyse nuances in the "traffic" of negotiations of identity through art (I borrow Said's use of the notion of traffic, which is outlined below) (Said 1993:20).

My decision to feature four artists rather than focus on one or two, follows from a desire to explore the differing exile locations experienced by Palestinians since 1948, and the ways these articulate with art forms and styles, different regimes of signification, and differing roles of the artist. In the course of researching visual art by Palestinian artists, I had discussions and corresponded with several artists of Palestinian origin whose works are not represented in the dissertation but nonetheless inform my analysis.¹³

¹³ Correspondence with Kamal Boullata in the early stages of research was helpful. The three artists of the initial seven examined which were not included in Chapter Three are Ottawa-based mixed media artist Sami Zubi, Montreal-based painter Maha Al-Alami, and Jamal Gharbia, a painter from London, Ontario. A few months after interviewing Gharbia, he made a trip to Gaza and died prematurely. As mentioned, for reasons of clarity these artists' works are not included in Chapter Three, but inform my analysis. I also visited a retrospective exhibit of Mona Hatoum's work. Perhaps the most widely known Palestinian artist in the West, a retrospective

The images are considered "as practice," and as part of "historical connections, conditions and consequences" (Fabian 1996:219). Staying close to the image and its effects (on me and on those who relayed their impressions to me) is combined with 'reading' symbols and images as social and political practice. A selection of the four artists' works are reproduced in the dissertation, and are examined for insight into ways that images and symbols of Palestinian national and cultural identity serve to enact, nuance, and re-place Palestinian identities in exile. In addition to the framework outlined earlier in this chapter, I draw on bell hooks' notion of art and aesthetics. hooks notes that art, its production, exhibition, and viewing is a way of inhabiting space and of "looking and becoming" (hooks 1990:104). Art is put to myriad uses and has effects that are multiple and amorphous. As I elaborate in Chapter Three, the works are part of "the map of interactions, the actual and often productive traffic occurring on a day-by-day, and even minute-by-minute basis among states, societies, groups, identities" (Said 1993:20). Said's notion of traffic is useful in emphasising processes rather than objects of art, as well as the mutually constitutive nature of material and discursive processes. The symbols, imagery, form—that is, the languages of art—articulate with discourses of art and culture, and relations of power. The works and performances in this study are

of Hatoum's work was featured in an exhibit at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, 1 August – 25 October, 1998. During this time, I visited the Museum on numerous occasions and conducted on-the-spot discussions with over 50 visitors. These discussions revealed a very strong correlation between visitors' backgrounds—artistic and biographical—and the way in which Hatoum's art works 'resonated' with them. Specifically, each visitor who was not from the United Kingdom, but had experienced periods of exile from his or her culture, expressed a sense that Hatoum's work emanated from the alienation she experienced as an exile in Britain. My discussions with these several dozen visitors were too brief to provide substantive information but were important in providing me with a sense of the wide expanse of responses to an artist's work, as well as with strikingly consistent correlations, such as the one mentioned above between the viewer's own 'cultural screens' and the meanings they associated with the art.

examined within the contexts of their genres, within social historical contexts, and with reference to artists' biographical trajectories.

"Looking and becoming," then, take place in particular locations and through various sites and processes of art. I examine the form and content of the works and performances, as well as the ways in which they are signified through processes of exhibition, representation, and viewing. The works, interview transcripts, exhibition sites, websites, guestbooks, critical reviews, and curators' and viewers' comments are considered examining ways in which the works are signified. The work of one of the artists, Amin Shammout, is also featured in a film, the making of which highlights different narratives and audience constructions.

The websites of two artists, Abdul Hadi Shala and Zahi Khamis, provided an opportunity to view their work in the context of their entire body of production.¹⁴ Abdul Hadi Shala's site includes a virtual guestbook in which 'visitors' to the site can write their impressions and other comments. This feedback, like that in exhibition guestbooks, provided insight into the meanings and role of their art in relationship to different audiences. My sense of the ways in which some viewers engage with Amin Shammout's works was obtained through brief conversations with four visitors to one of his exhibits (at Pier 21), comments from others recorded in and copied from the guestbook at this same exhibit, and longer conversations over the course of several months with two filmmakers working on a project that featured his work.

¹⁴ Their website addresses are: www://shala.ca/default.htm and www://zahiart.com/index.html

I drew only on English and French language sources in terms of reviews the artists' works, which limits the analysis but also reflects the focus on significations in the context of Western discourses and viewings. I reviewed catalogues that featured works by Bashir Makhoul. I also attended an exhibit of Makhoul's works, and a talk given by Makhoul about his work as he toured the exhibit. An art critic served as a discussant in this tour and both she and the artist answered questions from audience members. As with all the interviews, I tape recorded this talk and the questions and answers, and transcribed it shortly thereafter. I did not view exhibits of Zahi Khamis and Abdul Hadi Shala's works. Rather, I obtained images from the artists and from their websites, and collected information in interviews with the artists on their perception of the meanings which viewers construct in viewing their works.

Interviews with six of the initial seven artists took place in their studios, homes, or at the exhibition sites. I interviewed the seventh artist (Zahi Khamis) by telephone (see Appendix A for interviews conducted and concerts attended). The interviews were semi-structured, and I aimed to draw out artistic styles, influences, training, and cultural backgrounds of the artists. Biographical information was also collected and several follow-up discussions were held with most of the artists. The approach that informed my analysis of interview transcripts is described below. Each of the artists gave their permission for me to photograph their works and reproduce them in this dissertation. Additional permission was obtained from the Canadian Museum of Civilization, as well as a publisher and photographer who are given credit in citations accompanying the images. Shala and Khamis sent images of their works to me in digital form and, as

mentioned, I obtained additional images from their websites with their permission.

(Images are inserted digitally in the text of the dissertation.)

During the course of research for and writing of the dissertation I constructed somewhat of a gallery space on the walls surrounding my workspace. That is, I mounted several images from each artists' body of work on matting boards and perched these against walls in my line of view as I looked up from my computer screen. This gave me easy access to them, and enabled me to view images over time, in relation to the other images by the same artist, and alongside the works of the other artists. This display also provided me with impressions from visiting friends; these responses were treated more anecdotally as compared to responses I gathered from visitors to the artists' exhibits or those recorded in exhibit and website guestbooks. The latter were recorded in my notebook and given more weight as they were views of those who sought out the images or exhibitions.

I looked for symbolism in the works of seven artists with whom I had also conducted indepth interviews. I examined the works and interview transcripts for articulations of Palestinian identity, places of exile, and navigations of belonging. I also considered the form and style of the images, their place of exhibition, audience engagements, and the artists' own biographical and artistic border crossings. The works articulate with the artists' multiple places of exile, and diverse training and cultural influences. The works also reflect artists' and audiences perceptions of the need to contemporize Palestinian historical memory. Indeed some of the works reflect artists' depictions of seminal events in Palestinian history, such as the *nekba*, such as the works by Amin Shammout.

Another artist, Zahi Khamis, produces works that seem to bear witness to the psychological trauma of Palestinian history and the contemporary burden of remembering.

The works of art also reflect continuums and discontinuities of languages and places of representation. The four artists' multiple places of exile shape the form and content, as well as meanings of their works. Early in the course of research, the notion of a spectrum formed in my mind. Along the spectrum are different dimensions of Palestinian experience and identity. First are depictions of the *nakba* and exile, the kernel events that define Palestinian historical experience, future aspirations, and present identity. Second are images of the political and social dimensions of national struggle. Another dimension along the spectrum are images that witness the psychological cost born by refugees and their offspring in carrying the burden of Palestinian history and current predicament. Finally, the spectrum contains works that destabilize notions of fixed identities. Bashir Makhoul's works do this by fusing Western abstract forms and political comment, thus infusing Western abstraction with the imperative to bear witness.

Each artists' works that I examine in Chapter three might be situated within this spectrum, addressing one of these four dimensions of Palestinian experience more directly than another. The spectrum or trajectory (which forms the organising principle for the chapter) also reflects the artists' different places of exile. For example, it begins with the literal narratives of the *nakba* depicted during the 1960s from Amin Shammout's vantage point within the growing Palestinian diaspora community in

Kuwait. It ‘ends’ with Bashir Makhoul’s route to and from his identity via Israeli negation of Palestinian culture and identity and then from his exile in Britain.

I refer to this spectrum of dimensions as a trajectory in this study. Importantly, the trajectory does not imply a normative progression from “political art” to “fine art,” or from sentimental depictions to more sophisticated uses of languages of art. Rather, the trajectory is a heuristic structure that serves to link several aspects of the works of art, their exhibition contexts, and the artists’ training and exile locations. It is also important to note that while I situate the works at certain points along the trajectory, this does not imply that the artists’ styles and subject matter are unchanging. On the contrary, the artists’ bodies of work reflect continual evolution of form, style, and content.

Through the framework of the trajectory, I draw out a few of the different ways that images, identities, places, memories, and subjectivities of the works are abstracted and performed in social contexts and through aesthetic languages. The works of art have their own conceptual agency (Bal 1996; Fabian 1996), and are photographically reproduced in Chapter Three. Their reproduction is meant to elaborate my argument, as well as create an additional space in which the works can be viewed, generating still additional encounters and meanings separate from both the context of museum and exhibition processes and the context of my own necessarily partial analysis.

Situating art and identity – exhibition processes:

With my decision to focus the bulk of fieldwork on Palestinian artists in Canada, the context of Canada became increasingly compelling to me: how were these artists' works and their aspirations shaped by the Canadian context in particular? How might discourses of Canadian multiculturalism affect the 'screens' through which spectators viewed works of art by Palestinian Canadians? Within the first week of fieldwork in Canada, I happened to view two brief television broadcasts that remained at the back of my mind through fieldwork and the writing up process. One of these was a commercial for coffee from "Tim Horton's," a Canadian company. The add featured a member of the Canadian Armed Forces drinking a cup of the coffee in the vast expanse of desert in an unspecified location in the Middle East. The cup of coffee was meant to reunite the serviceman with his 'Canadian' comforts and identity, constituted through the contrast with the surrounding scene of a seemingly alien and empty desert.

The second broadcast was even briefer and featured two young men of Arab backgrounds speaking into a live video camera mounted in the entrance lobby of the National Gallery of Canada. The clip was similar in ways to many others of visitors who, impromptu, spoke on random subjects while sitting in a partially enclosed booth. Five- to ten-second excerpts of this footage were aired between regular television programming on a local television station. The two young Arab Canadian men in this particular clip were in their late teens or early 20s. They were explaining in an earnest and somewhat exasperated way that just because they are Arab and Middle Eastern does not mean they are terrorists. In a poignant and entreating manner, they each declared "I

am human.” Their words and demeanour seemed to reflect the saliency of the discourse underlying the Tim Horton’s commercial. The two individuals are not unique in defining themselves in relation to wider discourses. As sociologist Margaret Somers rightly notes, “all of us come to *be* who we *are* (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing) by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives *rarely of our own making* (Somers 1994:606). The discursive context of North America and the West in general is one in which Palestinians and Arabs (generally) are defined through Orientalist categories and processes (Said 1979).

With these two broadcasts in mind, my concern with regard to artistic expressions by Palestinians expanded to include ways in which discourses of Arabs and the Middle East in Canada shaped the narrative context or cultural screens through which works of art are signified. I decided to examine a ‘slice’ of this context by way of a national exhibition on Canadian artists of Arab origin.

The exhibit featured contemporary art by 26 artists of Arab origin living in Canada.¹⁵ The exhibit was entitled *Ces pays qui m’habite, The Lands Within Me: Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin*, and was held at the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC) in Hull, Quebec, from October 2001 to March 2003. Particular cultural politics, discourses, and institutional processes shaped ways in which the works of art in *Lands Within Me* acquired meaning and efficacy, and these are the subject of Chapter Four. Broadly speaking, the chapter engages with the paradoxical and poetic sentiment

¹⁵ The initial plan by the curator of the exhibit was to include two Palestinian artists in this exhibit—one was Sami Zubi, based in Ottawa, and the other was Mona Hatoum, based in

expressed by Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish: “The diaspora is so strong in me I think I will bring it home.” Approaching this paradox from a different direction, I explore what becomes of ‘home’ and ‘diaspora’ when the subjectivities they suggest are gathered in a national museum exhibit and translated through discourses of art and culture, official multiculturalism, museum context, processes of exhibition, and “post September 11 concerns.”¹⁶

Research on the exhibit began with contacting and liaising with the assistant curator three years before the exhibit was initially scheduled to open (and four years before it actually opened). I gathered information and insight through written correspondence and meetings with the assistant curator and later with the curator. These interviews were conducted prior to the opening of the exhibit and provided insight into the planning process, including decision making regarding selection of works of art, the exhibit’s theme, and how the museum context itself would be navigated. The assistant curator provided me with slides of works both by artists who had been selected by the museum to be included in the exhibit, as well as by those who had not been chosen. I reviewed the curator’s files on the artists’ biographies and artistic approaches, and researched the museum’s own files on its institutional history and on various controversies in its inception. I went to the exhibit five times, twice bringing my laptop and typing notes of

London, England. The final selection of works did not include Mona Hatoum’s work. The other artists were of various other Arab origins.

¹⁶ This expression gained wide usage to indicate a before-and-after shift in worldviews and ‘concerns’ that emerged after the attacks on the World Trade Centre towers and the Pentagon in September of 2001. I use it here to indicate changed constructions of various dualities such as ‘us’ and ‘them,’ ‘our concerns’ and ‘their violence,’ that were reflected in official and media discourses in the months following the attacks. As these dualities took shape at the level of discourse, they played out in people’s day to day choices of what to where and where to venture, and in the ways in which one defined and articulated one’s identities or identifications.

my own impressions and text information accompanying the works. On two visits, friends accompanied me and I included their observations in my note taking.

Prior to the opening of the exhibit, I interviewed five of the 26 artists who were to be featured. I also interviewed a performer (featured in Chapter Five) in the opening night ceremonies of the exhibit. These interviews were open ended, but structured around a set of questions regarding their art and identity (see Appendices 1 and 2 for fieldwork and interview schedules). A film and cultural festival was held in conjunction with the exhibit's opening activities, which I also attended.

Once the opening of the exhibit approached, public and Canadian government protest emerged in response to the museum president's announcement that the exhibit would be postponed so the museum could "add context" in light of the attacks on 11 September 2001, in the United States two weeks prior. I analyse the cultural politics surrounding this announcement and the media coverage that emerged. The museum's file of media articles were made available to me by the museum library staff which enabled me to review and analyse over two hundred newspaper articles, editorials, letters to editors, and opinion pieces in Canadian daily papers between 25 September and 22 October 2001. I also examined press releases, wire sources and media transcripts of radio coverage from the same period, and attended a panel discussion in which one of the artists and a writer involved in the exhibit participated.

Incidents of violence against Muslim, Arab, and South Asian Canadians were anticipated and reported.

I also closely examine the institutional and discursive context of the Museum of Civilization, and the constructs of the art and artists produced through exhibition design, layout, and texts. As anthropologist Johannes Fabian notes, art works are not just lined up, but performed through sites of exhibition, imagery, symbols, and economic and communicative contexts that contribute to the ways in which the art and its exhibition or performance is constituted and consumed (Fabian 1996:249). Performativity is engendered in all aspects of the material production of art as well as its exhibition and performance. The exhibition of works, artists' narratives of their work as I interviewed them, the layout and texts of the exhibit are examined as performances of art and subjectivities and identities (Fabian 1996; Bhabha 1994).

I draw on theories of performance and performativity as they have engaged human geography analyses (Dewsbury 2000; Gregson and Rose 2000; Revill 2000; Smith 2000; Thrift 2000; Thrift and Dewsbury 2000). These recent works conceptualize performance spaces and the performance of "everyday life" in ways that are useful to this examination, not least because they suggest "intriguing possibilities for thinking about the constructedness of identity, subjectivity, and agency" (Gregson and Rose 2000:434).

Along with a number of geographers, Gregson and Rose suggest that performance and 'performativity' are important conceptual tools for a critical geography analysis of everyday social practices. But, performance and performativity have been theorized in very different ways, depending on various understandings of agency, subjectivity, and power (Gregson and Rose 2000:434). For Gregson and Rose, what individuals do and

say, and the citational practices which reproduce or subvert discourse are connected “through the saturation of performers with power” (Gregson and Rose 2000:434). Space also is “a performative articulation of power” (Gregson and Rose 2000:434). And, as Smith asserts, “the manner in which listeners go about deciphering, classifying, and assimilating sound is also a performance,” one that is powerful and historically constituted (Smith 2000:634).

Fabian’s ethnographic approach and notion of performativity are useful for examining ways in which artistic, cultural, and socio-political meanings are engaged and constituted. The notion of performativity includes sites of performance and exhibition, the images and symbols used, the economic and communicative contexts, and discourses that contribute to the ways in which the art and its exhibition or performance is constituted and consumed. A focus on performativity, then, enables a move away from examining representations and toward analysing the multiple processes of the production of meaning through works of art and performance.

As mentioned, performativity is engendered in all aspects of the material production of art as well as its exhibition and performance. Artists’ narratives of their work as I interviewed them, and the relationship between images of despair to images of hope, for example, also represent performances of the art. Artists, audiences, media reviews, institutional processes and the like stage identifications and belonging. In the process, competing “transcripts” (Scott 1990:19, 202) of art, culture, politics, and identity are engaged, and cultural belonging is created. Homi Bhabha notes that terms of cultural engagement are produced performatively (Bhabha 1994:2).

Conceptualizing performance in this way also provides a framework in which to examine the links between the performing bodies of the musicians and the social and discursive context, as well as the political possibilities that are reflected and transformed by the performance (as examined in Chapter Five). The emphasis is on the interrelation of performer, performance, audience, context, the space itself of performance, and relations of power. In this framework, the performer and performance are not distinct, and the space of performance is understood as pre-given (Gregson and Rose 2000:438). This study, then, draws on geographic analysis that conceptualizes performers as produced by power, and not—as some other geographical accounts put forth—removed “from power’s social script” (Gregson and Rose 2000:438).

In this regard, I looked for discursive constructs that emerged of art, identity, ‘Canadian’ culture, ‘Arab art,’ and ways in which “knowledges, images, [and] discourses are socially and pedagogically authorised” (Bhabha 1994:270). The works of art included in the exhibit featured in Chapter Four have efficacy beyond the events that served to construct the exhibit as ‘controversial,’ and I briefly describe a selection of works (images of which are reproduced in the text). This exhibit and the cultural politics and representations associated with it illustrate, for one, the play of art and discourses, and suggests ways in which the art works and artists are able to interpolate transcultural connections that challenge the assumed unified identity of ‘Arabs’ and divisions between culture and politics.

The analysis is informed by the growing literature on the role of museums and exhibition processes. I found cultural analyst Meike Bal's conceptualization of museums particularly useful in trying to understand the connection between museum discourse and institutional context, including the question of "what can be improved and what is, so to speak, hopeless or inherent in the institution" (Bal 1996:129). The chapter is also informed by works that address the role of art in processes of identity within Black American (Powell 1997) and Chicano communities (Gaspar de Alba 1998), and amongst New York Puerto Ricans and Latinos. Six months after the opening of the exhibit, the museum finalised its website so that one could virtually visit the exhibit, which I did.¹⁷

Narratives through music:

The embodied and rarefied nature of musical and dance performances and how these become part of social formations and negotiations of identity is the focus of Chapter Five. The approach is informed by geographic and anthropologic treatments of music and its performance, that consider music as articulating with and shaping relations of power (Stokes 1997; Smith 2000). I chose to organise the discussion around case studies of each of the musicians in turn. Unlike the visual artists, these musicians are all of the same generation. Examining their musical and dance performances in turn allows for differences to be treated in their own right. Threaded through the chapter is the theme of embodied performance and what this contributes to understandings of enactments of identity by Palestinians.

¹⁷ The exhibit can be found at: <http://www.civilization.ca/cultur/cespays/payinte.html>

The analysis draws heavily on the musicians' narratives recorded during interviews I conducted with them, and my own observations and those of others during the musicians' respective concerts. I attended several concerts by two of the three musicians (the third musician emigrated to the United States shortly after our interview). In examining the musician's narratives, performance styles, and choices of musical form and strategies, the analysis focuses on what is at stake in the production, representation, and performance of art by the artists. As anthropologist Susan Slyomovics notes, with regard to writers, each artist produces work that is "inseparable from questions of geographical location and historical time: Where do you live? For whom do you write? When and under what circumstances did you write?..." (Slyomovics 1998:183).

These questions, rather than an analysis of their music *per se* forms the basis of the inquiry into the musicians' performances. Unlike the preceding chapters, the chapter on musical performance does not include visual images of the performance sites, nor visual reproductions of performance sites or musical scores, nor audio recordings of the music. While such data would contribute additional insight, they are not included for two reasons. Analysis of musical scores and audio recordings remain somewhat beyond the scope of my own expertise. Additionally, my desire was to highlight the musicians' own renderings of the meaning of their art, and on the similarities and differences in their performance strategies. Unlike the visual artists, the musicians are all of the same generation. But, importantly, their biographical trajectories from Palestine to Canada

are very different. The chapter focuses on examining ways in which their musical performances are means of enacting identity and belonging.

As noted in Chapter Five, analyses of identity have moved away from the idea of essentialism and toward examinations of the construction and negotiation of identity. The music itself (as well as one musician's dance performances) do not reveal an 'authentic' Palestinian identity. Rather, identity is the effect of performance, not the reverse (Bell 1999:3). Hence, my treatment of the artists' musical performances attempts to highlight performative and strategic uses of music (as well as dance) in delineating boundaries of community and belonging by musicians and audiences.

Approach taken in interviewing and analyzing interview transcripts:

Interviews were conducted with artists and curators, and on-the-spot discussions were held with audience and exhibition visitors. Interviews with artists focused on their work, their lives, their aspirations, and their identifications (see Appendices A and B). My interest lay in investigating artists' narrative constructions of their works and identities. The settings, studios, homes, gallery spaces, restaurants, became sites of enactments of their identities as artists, and as artists of Palestinian origin (as this was my stated interest in interviewing those who were of Palestinian origin) or Arab origin (in interviews with artists involved in the Canadian Museum of Civilization). Like their performances, the interviews were also sites of enactment of social, cultural, gender, class, and religious difference.

In analysing the transcripts of interviews, I was interested understanding how identity markings and references are *used by* them rather than, that is, in diagnosing the artists' identities. I attempted to understand how the artists employ markers of identity and toward what purposes. Michael Moerman notes that "the 'truth' or 'objective correctness' of an identification is never sufficient to explain its use" (Moerman 1974:61; in Antaki and Witticombe 1998:2). This is because identity is 'unfixed' and continually negotiated. Antaki and Witticombe note that:

Membership of a category is ascribed (and rejected), avowed (and disavowed), displayed (and ignored) in local places and at certain times, and it does these things as part of the interactional work that constitutes people's lives (Antaki and Witticombe 1998:2).

Identity is an active process that the narrator "works up to, for themselves and others, in the course of the conversation," either as an end in itself, or towards some other end (Antaki and Witticombe 1998:2). As mentioned above, a certain amount of autobiographical reading—reading another's story as if it were, or could have been, one's own—informs my understanding of artists' narratives. For example, when one musician relayed that she had learned from an aunt of her father's experience of trauma in 1948, I recalled the delayed and circuitous way in which I learned of my father's experiences of the *nakba*. In sharing similarities, my identity, like those of the artists, was enacted and rhetorically 'placed' within a negotiated map of Palestinian subjectivity.

Biographical trajectories as method and source:

From the 1960s there has been a move away from focusing on artists' biographies or artistic intentions. Yet, it is recognised that it is productive to ask artists to tell their own histories of their art, rather than leave the task entirely to art historians (King et al. 1999:7). Artists who are heirs of colonised peoples and working in the metropolis of former colonisers are attempting to shift Eurocentric perspectives on art history by recording themselves and their contemporaries in history and engaging theoretical issues and criticism (King et al. 1999:19). Bashir Makhoul, Palestinian from the Galilee and a practising artist in Manchester, England, is a case in point. Makhoul's PhD study of Palestinian art includes a retrospective of his own works. His art is examined in Chapter Three, and I draw on his dissertation for broader understandings of Palestinian art and history, which are addressed in Chapter Two.

Another case for integrating information on artists' biographical backgrounds into an examination of their works involves their significance in indicating both differences as well as shared experiences. For Palestinians, the colonization, war, and dispersion to numerous countries around the world means that there are many diverse individual trajectories amongst Palestinians. In the West Bank and Gaza, they face conditions of occupation, and in Israel contend with second or third class citizenship and cultural alienation. Palestinians in refugee camps suffer devastating poverty, statelessness, lack of civil rights and perpetual insecurity regarding the future. At the same time, the collective drive to better themselves through education has resulted in large numbers of highly educated and skilled Palestinians who have contributed to building prosperity in

Arab countries, and made substantial professional, social and political contributions within diaspora communities in the West.

The unrepresentativeness of Palestinians' lives is, in fact, a thread of commonality among them. Makdisi notes: "Although my life has been largely unrepresentative of the lives of the vast majority of people living in this region, this very unrepresentativeness seems oddly to emphasise the nature of the people and place to which, however tangentially, I am attached" (Makdisi 1990:32). Interestingly, at the same time, the fault lines of individual Palestinian lives reflect those of the region as a whole. Their identity crises are found in whole generations and classes of people in the Middle East (Makdisi 1990:33). Biographical sketches of artists are important analytical tools in examining the role of cultural performance and products in providing, as art historian Irit Rogoff notes, "immense opportunities for rewriting culture through our concerns and our journeys" (Rogoff, 2000: 30).

A benefit of examining the works of art and performances of several artists rather, that is, than examining the works of one or two artists, lies in the insight gained from examining differences between them—generational, regional, historical, and social, to name but a few. These differences guard against reproducing the notion of a unified Palestinian exile identity or experience. The exile location and identity of the artists remains contingent on its performance through art, exhibition, and musical performance. Rasheed Araeen's caution is heeded in that the notion of the exile must not merely "elicit sympathy which in turn allows the ruling system to define and construct them as postcolonial Others" (Araeen 2000:9). Further, examining several

artists enables a better understanding of ways in which artistic languages and performances represent critical strategies of representation and identity.

A limitation inherent in examining several artists, rather than focusing on one or two, concerns the breadth of treatment of each artist's body of work. While I situate the works of art with reference to each artist's body of work, I focus on a relatively small selection of their work and performances. With regard to the two visual artists whose works I viewed in the context of exhibitions (Shammout and Makhoul), some of their works in these exhibitions are reproduced in the thesis. For the other two artists, whose works I came to know through their websites and through images sent to me electronically from the artists (Shala and Khamis), the images reproduced in the thesis are reflective of the spectrum of their works. As mentioned, the themes through which I examine their works, individually and together, arose in the course of research and of my viewing of the works (or printouts of their works) over time. My own viewing position and analytical framework derives from my insider/outsider relationship to the artists and the subject of Palestinian art and identity.

The set of questions I bring to the study is informed by my previous research into contradictions and schisms between social and political struggles in Palestine—the women's movement and the national movement. My Palestinian origin and my location within the Canadian cultural context places me in an 'in between' space of identity that I variously navigate. While my own Palestinian Canadian biography and identity is not drawn on as sources of data, they provide vantagepoints that have informed this study of diaspora navigations of artists and works of art.

Use of pseudonyms, transliteration:

I use the real names of visual artists as this was their explicit request. Two of the musicians expressed their preference that I use pseudonyms. While writing up the dissertation, I could not contact the third musician to confirm their preference. As a result, I have chosen a pseudonym for each of the musicians. I have used the transliteration system employed by the International Journal of Middle East Studies, in which diacritical marks are not included. When quoting another source, I have left in diacritical marks as written in the original source.

1.5 Organization of the dissertation

The three areas of focus in the dissertation are addressed in three separate chapters, outlined below. These are preceded by Chapter Two that illustrates ways in which the works of art discussed in proceeding chapters engage with processes, narratives and counter narratives of Palestinian history. For Palestinians, an intimate rapport exists between visual imagery, visual and rhetorical use of the Arabic language, the political context of struggle, and discourses of national identity. Chapter Two examines historical developments in Palestine with a view to better understanding what is at play in the imagery, symbolism, exhibition, and the ways in which art ‘performs’ identities and subjectivities. The chapter also presents a sketch of narrative battles that correspond to the geopolitical conflict between Palestinians and Israel, and sketches artistic

expression (primarily visual art) in the West Bank and Gaza, Israel, and Arab and Western diasporas.

Chapter Three explores what visual art contributes to our understanding of ways in which Palestinian identity is created and enacted in exile. A selection of art works by four Palestinian artists living in Canada, the United States, and England is examined. I propose, as mentioned, that their works can be situated along a trajectory that reflects different ways in which imagery, identity, place, memory, and subjectivity are abstracted and take on social meaning and efficacy.

Chapter Four focuses on an exhibit of contemporary art by artists of Arab origin living in Canada: *Ces pays qui m'habite, The Lands Within Me: Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin*, at the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC) in Hull, Quebec, from 2001 to 2003. Examined are the cultural politics, discourses, exhibition design, and the institutional processes that shaped ways in which the works in the exhibit acquired meaning and efficacy.

Chapter Five explores the narratives and performance strategies of three musicians of Palestinian origin living in Canada. The chapter draws out ways in which embodied performance sites represent powerful confluences between styles, discursive spaces, audience engagement, and transnational political relations and cultural politics. The chapter looks at performance strategies and the ways in which these represent enactments that create potentially transformative spaces of identity and belonging.

Chapter Six summarises the findings of the research. I suggest the contributions this research makes to geographic analyses, as well as future directions this research might take.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORY AND ART OF DISPOSSESSION AND EXILE

2.1 Introduction

The events and narratives of Palestinian history function as both context as well as subject matter of artistic expression. This chapter examines historical developments in Palestine with a view to the ways in which they shaped the form, style, content, and role of artistic expression. The chapter also examines how visual imagery has, in turn, elaborated and shaped narratives of collective experiences. Underlying the chapter, and the thesis in general, is the notion that art consists of the crises it goes through, and reflects artists' active engagements with social, national, and transnational dislocations and struggles.

The focus and the level of detail of the discussion prefigure the attention to historical events in the content of works of art by the artists examined in Chapter Three. In this regard, the chapter outlines narrative battles that correspond to the geopolitical conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. These battles, for example around the tenacious Israeli founding mythology of Palestine as 'a land without a people for a people without a land,' play out within the imagery of works of art and form part of the context in which spectators engage with art by Palestinian artists.

I begin with a note on cultural and political change and continuity in Palestine, beginning at the turn of the second millennium BCE. I also present a brief outline of

social and demographic ramifications of the upheavals of the British mandate, Zionist immigration, and the creation of Israel. Also included is a review of the effects of dispossession, exile, and cultural alienation on the form and content of art, particularly visual art, by Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, Israel, and the diasporas.

2.2 History as object: “What is Palestine?”

The question in the above subheading is taken from the title of an introduction to a study on the embroidery patterns and social contexts of Palestinian women’s clothing, by British art historian Yedida Kalfon Stillman (Stillman 1979:1). Stillman’s answer to the question “what is Palestine?” begins in the second millennium BCE, and reflects a writing of ancient history into narratives of contemporary cultural forms.

Briefly, the geographical designation of Palestine has shifted over time. Its earliest reference was to the coastal area of present-day Israel which was settled in the late second millennium BCE by a people called the Philistines in the Bible. Greek and Roman references to *Palaestina* refer to the Philistine coastal area as well as the land east of it as far as present-day Saudi Arabia (Stillman 1979:2). The name took hold in the first century AD under Roman rule. By the fifth century there were three Palestinian provinces: *Paleaestina Prima*, *Secunda*, and *Tertia* which, together, corresponded to present-day Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, the Golan Heights and part of the Sinai Peninsula.

Several cities of Palestine, including Jericho, Hebron, Jaffa, Haiffa, Acre, and Jerusalem, were founded by Canaanites, Semitic peoples originating in Saudi Arabia, as early as the third millennium BCE. The Canaanites developed and traded in ceramics, glass blowing, ivory carvings, and textiles. Between 3000 and 1200 BCE, control of the area that includes present day Israel, Syria and Lebanon changed hands between the Phoenicians, Assyrians, Greeks, Babylonians, Persians, Romans, and Byzantinnians.

Between 634 and 640 AD these provinces were wrested from their Byzantine overlords by the Muslim Caliphate of the Arabian Peninsula. Palaestina Prima became the province of Filistin, with its capital at Lydda (modern-day Lod). Other than during the crusades (from the end of the eleventh to the end of the thirteenth centuries), Palestine remained under Muslim rule until the twentieth century, when it became part of the British Mandate of Palestine in 1918. The Muslim conquest of Palestine, which was completed in 640, began a slow process of arabization and islamization, that was aided by the pride in which Arabs held their language and poetic heritage (Stillman 1979:3).

In terms of art developments, the Muslim Empire resulted in an “aesthetic revolution” in the arts (Shabout 1997:18-19). Architecture and calligraphy are the most notable manifestations. But painting also, as it developed through both political and religious imperatives (described below) that veered artists away from the imaging of nature, was transformed “into an autonomous world” and resulted in an aesthetic revolution (Shabout 1999:36). The two great shrines in Jerusalem, the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, were built during the Umayyad period. Islamic works of art have in common, despite geographic or national differences, an aesthetics tied to conceptions of

the world derived from the precepts and practices of Islam (Shabout 1999:21). These aesthetics took shape during or after the ninth century, developed in earnest during the thirteenth century, and ended in the seventeenth century, when modern Arab aesthetics began to emerge—along with the notion of a unified Islamic civilization (Bloom and Blair 1997:6).

It is often presumed that a prohibition against figurative representations is part of these aesthetics. Figurative painting and sculptures of living beings were and are banned from places of worship, though a literal ban on representations is not found in either the Qur'an or the Hadith (although a Qur'anic verse (5:90) deals with the prohibition of idolatry) (Shabout 1999:23, 25). Representations of living beings were considered too distracting to worshippers and too tempting for kings or rulers to use to elevate themselves to saintly positions (Ali 1989:xi). Nonetheless, depictions of living beings continued to adorn palaces and illustrate manuscripts though. The emphasis in Islamic art on geometric and two-dimensional design is thus better explained as deriving not from a presumed ban but from a focus in Islamic art on the spiritual representation of objects and beings, rather than their material attributes (Ali 1989:xi).

Nada Shabout's comprehensive scholarship on the issue of a prohibition illustrates how socio-political factors fuelled bans against representing living beings. For example, in early Islam (much the same could be said with regard to present-day Saudi Arabia), the prohibition served the political imperative to create a marked distinction between Islamic and other cultures. In particular, the perceived need to distinguish the new

Islamic culture from the cultures being incorporated into the Islamic Empire

necessitated a distinct ethos. As Shabout explains:

The formation of the new Islamic culture with its different identifiable habits and thoughts based on the uncompromising belief in the absoluteness and oneness of God dynamically distinct from the Christian divine view, and a certain way of life for the Moslem community with its emphasis on the totality of existence and complete integration of the secular and spiritual, spontaneously gave birth to a new social entity whose ethos rejected the complex and symbolic uses of visual forms in the conquered areas. In order to preserve its unique qualities and maintain the integrity of its identity, Islamic culture consciously rejected the habits and practices of the traditions it replaced and consequently rejected representations as an expression of culture. This rejection was then given a moral quality equating all aesthetic creations of the material world with vanity and evil (Shabout 1999:28-29).

In other words, Islamic artistic development consisted of modifying the meanings of local forms, styles, and techniques that belonged to other cultures (such as the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem which owes its form to the Christian martyrium shape). Not surprisingly, the same circumstances resulted in the growth of “a uniquely Moslem art” (Shabout 1999:29-31).

Another political factor of the imposition of a ban against depicting living figures is illustrated in the movement to translate Greek writings. Greek thought had an influence on Islamic aesthetics and also spawned a love of books and knowledge that resulted in manuscripts that then needed illustrating. The status of painters was elevated by the perceived importance of this task, but in the ninth century conservatives denounced Greek thought as alien and issued interdictions against representations of the image. Interestingly, their interdictions were also responses to the extravagances displayed by the palaces of caliphs and princes (Shabout 1999:33-34).

In the thirteenth century the ban extended to any representation of animate beings in painting or sculpture, which required the abandoning of any appearance of nature, perspective, chiaroscuro, and modeling, as these produced images that were perceived as too 'real' in competition with God's creative act. Artists did not abandon figurative painting but found a way around the interdiction, interpreting it instead as the removal of individuality in figurative depictions. This need to devise new strategies of representation resulted in an "explosion and development" of Muslim painting between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries, and its elevation "to a central place among the arts in Islam" (Shabout 1999:35).

When queried by me, most of the artists interviewed for this study expressed no concern about representing the human form or nature. An exception was an illustrator who, while living and working in Saudi Arabia, had to abide by the "sensitivities" of officials. His solution was to draw ink lines across the necks of his figures.¹⁸ In that regard, he would have satisfied Ibn Abbas, a ninth century supporter of a hadith. Abbas responded to a painter inquiring whether he should abandon his craft by suggesting, "but you can always chop off the animals' heads so they won't look alive, and you can do your best to make them look like flowers" (Shabout 1999:36).

From 1516, Palestine (as well as Syria and, soon thereafter, Egypt) fell under Turkish rule which was maintained until World War II, when the Ottoman army was defeated by Britain and its allies. The long period of Ottoman rule was one of decline in the Palestinian provinces. Agriculture and trade suffered. A notable exception to the general

¹⁸ Personal interview, Mississauga, Ontario, 8 September 1999.

decline is the Turkish artistic influences in pottery, ceramics and tapestry—exemplified in the ceramic tiles that adorn the Dome of the Rock added in renovations by Ottoman Turks in the sixteenth century.

Napoleon's ill-fated invasion of Palestine in 1799 (as part of his Egyptian campaign) was a prelude to greater European influence in the nineteenth century. European consuls, in particular, British and French, increased and Christian missionary activity intensified. While these missions encouraged local handicrafts such as weaving and embroidery, European goods (British textiles, French paper, and Austrian glass) entered the region to the detriment of local industry (Stillman 1979:5). The agrarian basis of Palestinian society meant that art was functional as well as aesthetic and included calligraphy, painted icons, carvings on wood (mostly olive wood), stone carvings, mosaics, jewellery and ornaments carved from mother-of-pearl, pottery, weaving and straw work, embroidery and dying on cloth (Makhoul 1995:19). (The earliest form of embroidered cross-stitch found in Palestine dates from the eleventh century (El Khalidi 1999:31-32).)

The political and economic oppression of Ottoman rule led to the stagnation of the arts (with minor exceptions in a few provinces that had closer ties to the artistic developments in Istanbul) (Shabout 1999:73-74). The introduction of Western art into the region created an "artistic vacuum" and required artists to learn the aesthetic language of Western art (Shabout 1999:75). In her comprehensive examination of developments and continuities in modern Islamic art, Wijdan Ali elaborates:

By the turn of the century, Western art forms, mainly easel painting and sculpture, had replaced the traditional arts among Islamic artists from areas that

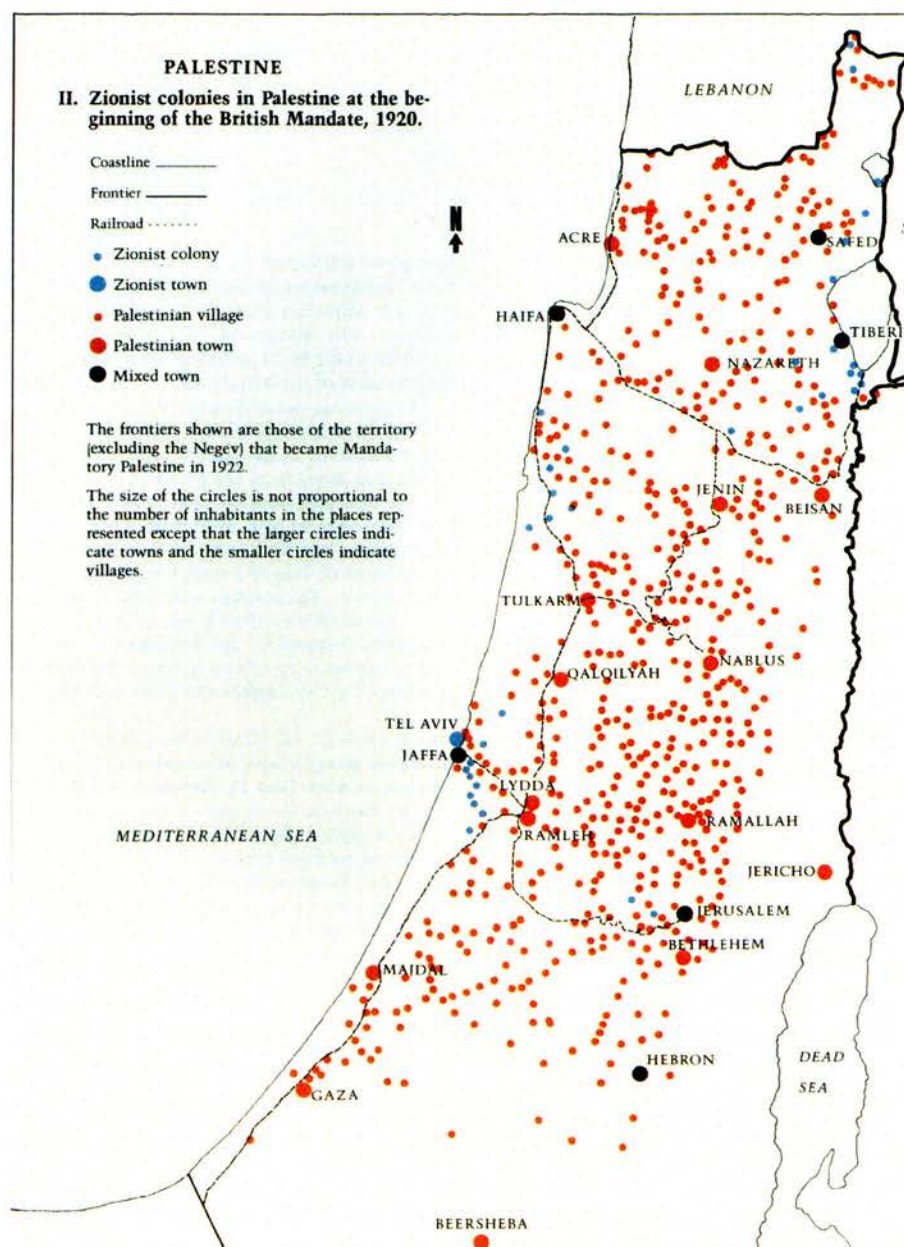
had an early Western-oriented art movement, such as Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, and Tunisia. This process was part of the alienation that engulfed modern artists. It cut them off completely from the roots of their artistic heritage and forced them to start learning painting and sculpture from naught. They began to study art as novices, severing all ties with their own visual heritage (Wijdan 1997:137).

As discussed below, this process was tempered in Palestine by the strength of craft traditions, in particular embroidery, which remained important aspects of Palestinian aesthetics, and by political developments which engulfed artists along with the rest of Palestinian society.

2.3 Subject matter: Precursors to Palestinian dispossession, *nakba* and exile

The last quarter of the 1800s brought immigration and colonization to Palestine. American and German Protestant groups founded agricultural communities and 25,000 Jewish settlers came from Eastern Europe. Some Muslim settlers also came from Bosnia and the Caucasus (Stillman 1979:5).

During World War I, the Levant became a major theatre of war. By 1918, Palestine was under British occupation (Lebanon and Syria were under French hegemony). Under the British Mandate between 1920 and 1947, Jewish immigration and land purchases by Zionist organizations greatly increased. As a result, Palestinians were facing dispossession from their land, unemployment, proletarianization, and severe economic hardship (Farsoun and Zacharia 1997:80). As outlined in greater detail below, the British Mandate government made conflicting promises to Palestinians and Jews, and then abandoned the conflict after paving the way for Jewish conquest of the land. These



MAP 2.1 Palestinian villages and towns and Zionist colonies and towns in 1920
 Source: Khalidi, Walid (1991). *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians 1876-1948*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, p. 34.

events are the precursors to the *nakba*, the catastrophe of dispossession and exile of Palestinians in 1948, upon the creation of the State of Israel. Both the consequent destruction of Palestinian society, and the denial of their loss, have profoundly affected

Palestinian identity, aspirations, cultural forms, and artistic expression. The discussion that follows outlines the social and political geography of Palestinian dispossession, beginning with a description of the Zionist movement that led to a dramatic, and continuing, transformation of the region.

Zionism:

Zionism is a modern Jewish political movement that began in the nineteenth century. A movement of secular nationalism, rather than Jewish religious identity, Zionism gained strength in the context of European imperialism, secular nationalism, and the rise of anti-Semitism and pogroms in Russia and Eastern Europe (Farsoun and Zacharia 1997:68). The infamous Dreyfus affair in France in 1890s was a catalyst for Jews in Western Europe to emigrate to Palestine.¹⁹ Theodore Herzl, a Viennese journalist who was living in Paris during this time, became head of the World Zionist Organization (WZO) and declared its program as “the creation of a home for the Jewish people in Palestine” (Farsoun and Zacharia 1997:69).²⁰

¹⁹ Alfred Dreyfus was a Jewish French army captain found guilty of treason, stripped of his rank and shipped to a penal colony located off the coast of South America. A retrial found him guilty again. Although he was exonerated twelve years later, for some Dreyfus represented the disloyalty of French Jews.

²⁰ In 1881, Palestine had a small, migrant religious Jewish community of about 24,000 among a population of almost 500,000 Palestinians. Several waves of Jewish immigration increased the size of the Jewish settler community. Between 1882 and 1903 about 25,000, mostly Russian Jews and between 1904 and 1914, 35,000 eastern European Jews brought the total Jewish population to 85,000 (although many of these emigrated soon afterwards). In 1922, 89 percent of the population was Palestinian Arab and 11 percent was Jewish. Between 1932 and 1936, the percentage of the Jewish population rose from 16 percent to 28 percent (Farsoun and Zacharia 1997:76).

This was to be achieved through large-scale immigration and land acquisition. But, unlike the New World, Palestine was relatively heavily populated, with a thriving agrarian-based society. With the exception of certain swampy areas, it was densely populated and intensely cultivated. Baruch Kimmerling, an Israeli sociologist, points out that Palestine had a low or no degree of “fronteirity” available to immigrant settlers (Kimmerling 1983:3).

During World War I, Britain made commitments of support to both sides, promising Arab leaders an independent Arab state that would include Palestine (in the Husayn-McMahon correspondence) and promising the Zionists it would support the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine (the Balfour Declaration). The British Mandate incorporated the whole of the Balfour Declaration. While the Zionists were pleased with the mandate provisions, the Palestinian Arabs were not. Many of its articles referred to the Jewish community by name. On the other hand, the Arabs who comprised 90 percent of the population at the start of the mandate were referred to as “the other sections” of the population (Farsoun and Zacharia 1997:72-74).

The mandate system put in place political and economic frameworks for the colonization of Palestine by the Zionists and the disfranchisement of Palestinians. Herbert Samuel, the British Zionist Jew who became high commissioner for Palestine in 1920 had stated that the Zionist movement should try to create conditions in Palestine that would enable it to set up an independent state controlled by a Jewish majority. This corresponded to the goals of Chaim Weizmann, president of the WZO at the time, who

stated before the Paris Peace Conference in February 1919 his goal that “Palestine become as Jewish as England is English” (Muslih 1988:117-18).

Zionist policy of obtaining Palestine as a Jewish national homeland involved concerted attempts to obtain land holdings. In the first stages of Zionism, Jewish settlers acquired land by purchasing it from local or absentee owners.²¹ Land bought from absentee landowners contained whole villages that were razed by the new owners.²² The evicted Palestinian peasants could not work on the land once it became owned by a Jewish person as this was forbidden by the Zionist organizations (Makhoul 1995:14). Despite the White Paper of 1939²³ which imposed restrictions on Jewish land purchases, the total land purchased by Zionist organizations by 1945 amounted to 1.59 million dunums out of a total of 7.3 million dunums of arable land in Palestine (Farsoun and Zacharia 1997:79).

²¹ The selling of parcels of land and its alienation from the peasants who worked it has a long history in Palestine. The Ottoman treasury was depleted as a result of the Crimean war. Unable to repay its loans from the British and French, the Ottoman government negotiated to remove all taxes imposed on foreign traders. As a result, Palestine became a producer of wheat, barley, sesame and olive oil that were exported and the Ottomans created legislation to acquire the rural surplus of its provinces to trade on the world market (Sherwell 2003:34). The peasantry feared these new laws would lead to higher taxes and conscription into the Ottoman army so registered land in the name of a village elder or urban notable. This placed ownership of huge tracts of land in the name of urban elites, government officials and religious persons (Divine 1980: 217; referenced in Sherwell 2003:34) who had a weak relationship which made it easier for them to trade and perceive it as a commodity (Smith 1984:33; referenced in Sherwell 2003:34). The Mandate under Britain, together with the French control over Lebanon, created additional impetus for the sale of vast Palestinian estates in that absentee Lebanese landlords found it more manageable to sell to Jewish organizations than to navigate the new political boundaries that lay between them and their properties (Farsoun and Zacharia 1997:79). Importantly, the majority of the Palestinian population did not perceive land as a commodity. For the peasantry, it was a source of livelihood and was invested with spiritual significance (Sherwell 2003:34).

²² The transfer of ownership of one holding resulted in 21 Palestinian villages flattened and the eviction of 8000 farmers and their families (Makhoul 1995:14).

²³ Which, itself, had an “ironic aura” to Palestinians: Kimmerling notes that the White Paper’s “acceptance of their demand for majoritarian national independence (in ten year’s time), a strict prohibition on Jewish immigration, and a banning of land sales to Jews came just as the British finished them militarily and destroyed their national leadership” Kimmerling 1983:122).

The initial Zionist project of redemption of the land with Jewish agricultural labour transformed during the mandate period into the development of an urban, industrial Jewish economy and labour force. The British colonial government of Palestine contributed to the creation and protection of an exclusive Jewish economy, institutions, and land base, and unemployment relief for Jewish labour. Discriminatory labour policies handicapped Palestinian labour in terms of wage levels and working conditions, and contributed to Palestinian unemployment, indebtedness, and severe discontent. These factors were important determinants of the upheavals of Palestinians in 1929, 1936-39, and 1947-48 (Farsoun and Zacharia 1997:84-85). Notably, these factors also run counter to the dominant discourse of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as arising from age-old hatreds between 'Arabs' and 'Jews.' As Muhammad Muslih notes, "peasant dispossession...seems to have been more central to the Palestinian struggle against Zionist colonization than has been suggested in many writings on the subject" (Muslih 1988:72).

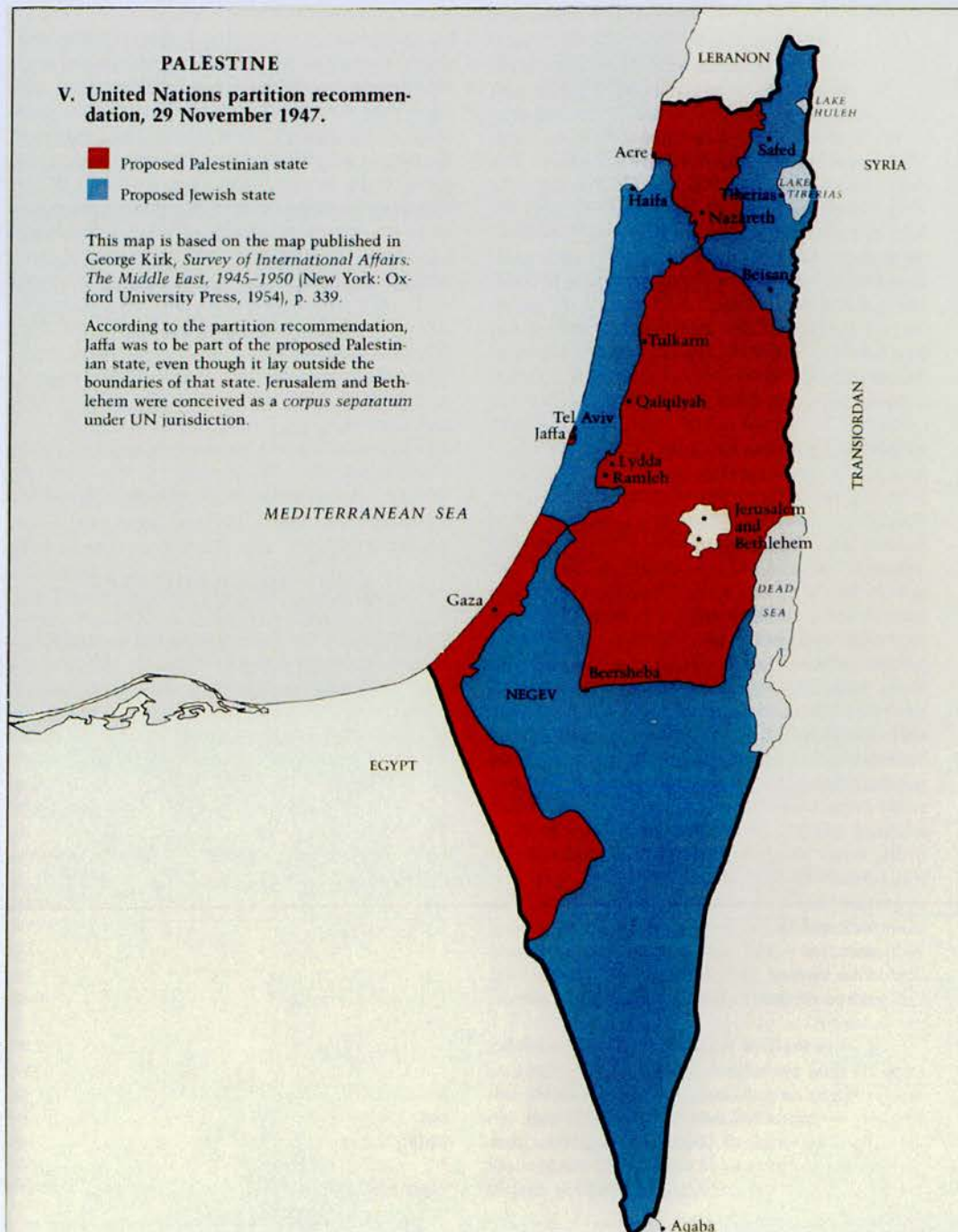
In addition to the purchase of land, terrorism was another tactic chosen by Zionist leaders. The frequent use of powerful explosives targeting civilian populations was introduced into the Palestinian conflict by the Irgun in 1937. Under Menachem Begin (later Prime Minister of Israel), the Irgun "perfected" these tactics, including the use of car bombs and hostage taking (Khalidi 1991:251). Another Jewish terrorist group, the Stern Gang, was led by Yitzhak Shamir (later speaker of the Knesset and Prime Minister of Israel). The Haganah militia, the forces controlled by the Jewish Agency, also grew in numbers and sophistication during the 1930s. Jewish forces also benefited from training by and joint militias with the British, while Palestinians were disarmed by

the British authorities. From 1942, the Zionists had planned and organised a Jewish army that later incorporated members of the Irgun and Stern Gang, as well as another terrorist group, the Haganah (Farsoun and Zacharia 1997:113).

By 1947, Britain referred the 'Palestine Problem' to the UN. The UN adopted a resolution to divide Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states, with Jerusalem as an international zone under UN administration (see Map 2.2). This partition was based on the Zionist plan that was endorsed by the United States in 1946 (Khalidi 1991:305). Palestinians rejected the plan, which gave 55 percent of the land of historic Palestine to the Jewish population, which constituted less than 35 percent of the population and owned 7 percent of the land (Khalidi 1991:305).²⁴

Hostilities quickly erupted and, in April of 1948, Jewish military forces launched operations throughout Palestine. The Irgun and Stern Jewish terrorist groups attacked and massacred most of the 245 inhabitants of Deir Yassin, a Palestinian village that had declared its neutrality. This massacre was pivotal in the conflict as it sent shock waves throughout Palestine and the Arab world. Subsequent Jewish attacks were also brutal: terror, psychological warfare, and direct conquests led to the destruction of hundreds of villages and the dismemberment of Palestine, with most of its population expelled as

²⁴ Other reasons why Palestinians rejected the proposed division are that nearly all the citrus land (half of which was Palestinian-owned) fell within the borders of the proposed Jewish state, 80 percent of the cereal land which was entirely Palestinian-owned, and 40 percent of Palestinian industry would fall within the Jewish state. Palestinian lands would, also, lose its contiguity with Jaffa, the major Palestinian port cut off from the rest of the Palestinian state. Access to both the Red Sea and to Syria would be severed and hundreds of villages would be separated from their fields and pastures (Khalidi 1991:305).



MAP 2.2 United Nations Partition Recommendation for Proposed Palestinian and Jewish States, 1947

Source: Khalidi, Walid (1991). *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians 1876-1948*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, p. 307.

refugees (Farsoun and Zacharia 1997:114). The State of Israel proclaimed its independence on 14 May 1948. Neighbouring Arab States declared war and at the end of fighting in February 1949, the Jewish state had gained territory (see Map 2.4). The West Bank came under Jordanian administration and Gaza under Egyptian administration.

Between 750,000 and 840,000 of the Palestinian population of 900,000 that had lived in the areas occupied by Israel became refugees in what would later be known as the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and in neighbouring Arab states (see Map 2.3, as well as its artistic rendition by Palestinian artist, Amin Shammout, in Figure 2.1). The vast majority of the Palestinians who fled their homes in 1948, left their villages and land out of fear created by the systematic terror campaigns conducted by the Israeli state forces (Farsoun and Zacharia 1997:127). While they intended to return in a matter of days or weeks, once they fled their homes and villages were occupied by Jews or bulldozed to prevent their return and resettlement. Nonetheless, the official Israeli version of history has insisted that there was no deliberate expulsion of Palestinians in 1948. As historian Zachary Lockman notes, there remains “a powerful need among many liberal Israelis to deny responsibility for Palestinian suffering” (Lockman 1989:187). Much of this denial has manifested in a dense debate about whether Palestinians fled or were driven from their homes (see Hitchens 1989:73-83).

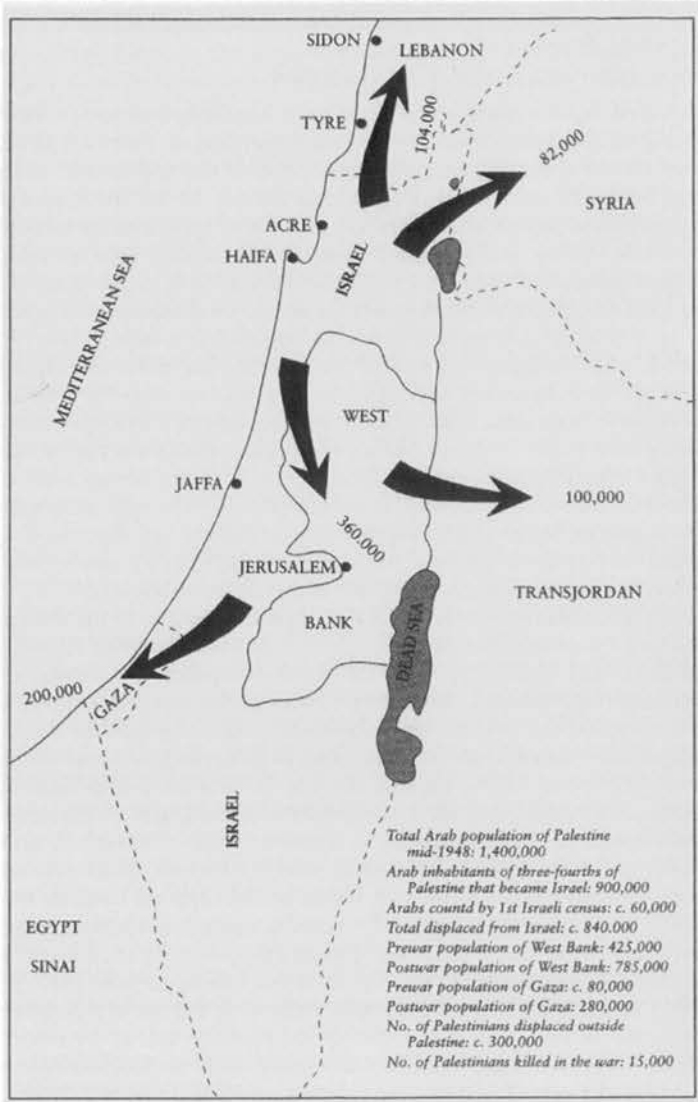
In recent decades, Israeli revisionist historians have re-examined the founding events and myths surrounding the creation of Israel and established “the existence of a definite

pattern of expulsion” (Flapan 1987:101, quoted in Lockman 1989:n.10).²⁵ Simha Flapan notes, further, that it became Israeli policy for Palestinians not to be allowed to return to their homes behind Israeli lines. This meant that temporary wartime displacement was turned into permanent exile. American historian Zachary Lockman notes that even after the armistice of 1948 deliberate expulsions multiplied. In fact, the idea of “transfer”—removing Palestine’s Arab majority outside the country to establish a homogeneous Jewish state—had long been an important component of Zionist thinking, going back to Herzl (Lockman 1989:191).

Following the establishment of the state of Israel, “the unofficial policy was unmistakable: the residual Arab population within Israel’s borders was to be made as small as possible” (Lockman 1989:194). With the knowledge and approval of its founding prime minister Ben Gurion, a “transfer committee” put bulldozers to work to systematically erase all traces of some 350 Palestinian villages and set up Jewish settlements in their place. The Israeli cabinet had reached a consensus against letting any of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homes (Lockman 1989:193-4).

Ben-Gurion, as prime minister of Israel, initiated the allocation of the refugees’ land to Jews and in the first year of the Israeli state, 130 Jewish settlements were established

²⁵ Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* (New York: Pantheon, 1987). Works by other Israeli revisionist historians include Benny Morris, *1948 and After: Israel and the Palestinians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) and, by the same author, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Tom Segev, *1949: The First Israelis* (New York: Free Press, 1986); Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

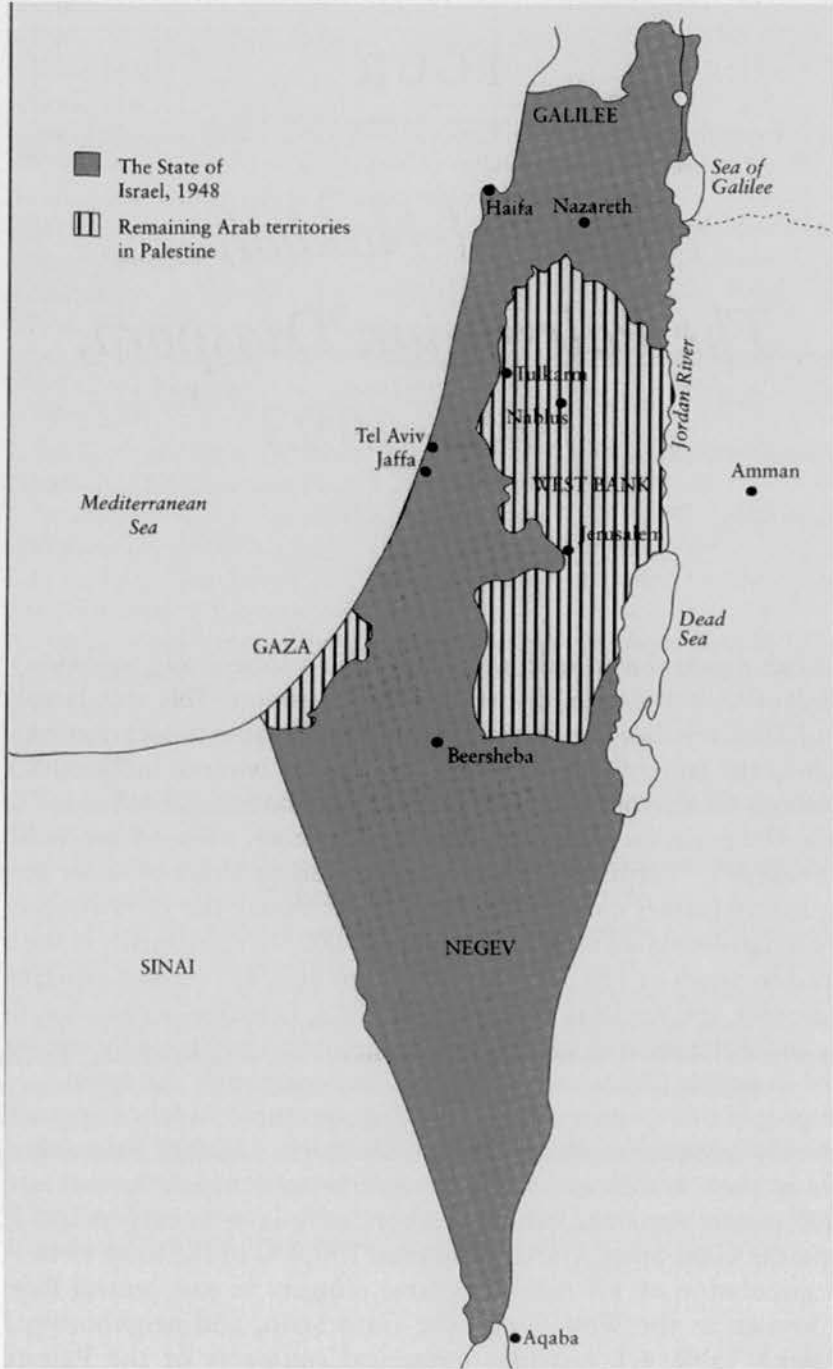


MAP 2.3 Magnitude, Distribution, and Destination of Palestinian Refugees, 1948

Source: Sayigh, Rosemary (1979). *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries*. London: Zed Press, p. 65.



Figure 2.1 Amin Shammout, *The Departure (Uprooting)* (1963), oil on canvas, 1 x 1.8m (photo by Tarek Abouamin)



MAP 2.4 Israel and the West Bank and Gaza, 1949 Armistice Frontiers

Source: Farsoon, Samih K. and Christina E. Zacharia (1997). *Palestine and the Palestinians*. Oxford: Westview Press, p. 124.²⁶

²⁶ Adapted from Simha Flapan (1987), *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities*. New York: Pantheon Books, p. 51.

where Arab villages and towns had stood (Kimmerling and Migdal 1993:155).²⁷

Because the Zionist movement was committed to transforming Palestine into a mono-religious Jewish state, its success has depended on it being equally intent on destroying Arab society as on constructing a Jewish life in Palestine (Said, et al. 1989:238). The phrase, “a land without a people for a people without a land,” first used by Israel Zangwill, a British Zionist, became central to the Israeli state’s claim that Palestine was virtually empty, or else filled with Arabs who had migrated down from Lebanon and Syria in the 1940s to take advantage of Zionist settlement and development.²⁸ An Israeli Minister of Education made this official policy, telling school teachers: “It is important that our youth should know that when we returned to this country we did not find any nation here and certainly no nation which had lived here for hundreds of years” (Makhoul 1995:13). This particular myth belies the fact that Palestine was the most densely populated part of the Eastern Mediterranean area of the Ottoman Empire at the start of British Mandate.

²⁷ When then former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin published his memoirs, he was forced by Israeli censors to remove passages describing the expulsion of Palestinians from Lydda and Ramle from both the Hebrew and English editions. Lydda and Ramle had a combined population of between 50-70,000, and Israeli soldiers were ordered to open fire “on anything that moved.” A massacre ensued in which more than 250 Palestinians civilians were killed, compared to four Israeli soldiers (Lockman 1989:186, 188-89).

²⁸ A book by American author Joan Peters entitled, *From Time Immemorial*, is a recent promulgation of the myth of the non-existence of Palestinians. Notably, while the book received a great deal of positive attention in the United States, it was deemed inaccurate and unscholarly by Israeli reviewers and was virtually ignored by European scholars. In any case, the myth that Zionist settlers ‘made the desert bloom’ was contradicted by their own admissions to the contrary in the early years of Jewish settlement. Arthur Ruppin, director of the Zionist settlement department, noted in a letter to a colleague, that “there is hardly any land which is worth cultivating that is not already being cultivated” (Said et al. 1989:240). Further, on a visit to Palestine in 1887, Lawrence Oliphant attested, in his book *Haifa, or Life in Modern Palestine*, that the valley of Esdraelon was “a huge green lake of waving wheat, with its village

Israeli historian, Simha Flapan had hopes that his research would help dismantle “the propaganda structures that have so long obstructed the growth of peace forces in my country” (Lockman 1989:195). Lockman, though, cautions that the works by Flapan and other Israeli scholars producing revisionist histories have not altered the terms of the debate in Israel or abroad, where official versions predominate. Rather, the myths surrounding Israel’s establishment and the dispossession of Palestinians remains tenacious. In Lockman’s words,

The official version of what happened in 1948 also fit in nicely with the political need to protect Israel’s wholesome image abroad. It has been the historic task of the left and liberal wings of the Zionist movement to explain and win support for the Zionist project as not only necessary to Jewish survival but also as entirely consonant with the highest ideals of “Western civilization.” Thus Zionism’s victims must be made to disappear or, if that fails, to bear the blame for their situation (Lockman 1989:188).

More recently, the actions of the Israeli state and the Zionist leaders preceding its establishment are “revisited” in Benny Morris’ most recent book, only to be declared “necessary” by him (Shavit 2004 np).²⁹

crowned mounds rising from it like islands; and it presents one of the most striking pictures of luxuriant fertility which it is possible to conceive” (Said et al. 1989:240).

²⁹ Morris was asked by a journalist, “So when the commanders of Operation Dani are standing there and observing the long and terrible column of the 50,000 people expelled from Lod walking eastward, you stand there with them? You justify them?” Morris’ reply was, “I definitely understand them. I understand their motives. I don’t think they felt any pangs of conscience, and in their place I wouldn’t have felt pangs of conscience. Without that act, they would not have won the war and the state would not have come into being... There are circumstances in history that justify ethnic cleansing. I know that this term is completely negative in the discourse of the 21st century... [but] a Jewish state would not have come into being without the uprooting of 700,000 Palestinians. Therefore it was necessary to uproot them. There was no choice but to expel that population. It was necessary to cleanse the hinterland and cleanse the border areas and cleanse the main roads. It was necessary to cleanse the villages from which our convoys and our settlements were fired on” (Shavit 2004). Morris’ words indicate, for one, that the knowledge of the atrocities committed against Palestinians is not sufficient, within certain discourses and modes of thought, to produce recognition of the legitimacy of Palestinians’ national claims, or restitution of wrongs. Any and all costs are justified, Morris implies, for the goal of creating a Jewish State. Morris’ book is entitled, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, published by Cambridge University Press (forthcoming).

Dispossession:

The dispossession of Palestinians in 1948 disrupted social and economic structures, excluded vast numbers from the productive employment, and created an alienation amongst refugees that was particularly severe. The issue of return for Palestinians has always been, even as they took flight, a question of when and how, rather than whether they would return to their homes and land. Stateless, the mystique of *awda*, the return to home and homeland, as mentioned in Chapter One, became stronger over time.

In 1967, the six day war resulted in defeat of the Arab armies and the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza by Israel (as well as of the Sinai desert and Golan Heights). More Palestinians became refugees, including some of those who had become refugees in 1948. In this second exodus, 400,000 Palestinians went mainly to Jordan; the percentage of Palestinians living in historic Palestine dropped from 63 to 50 percent (of the total of 2.65 million in 1967) (Farsoun and Zacharia 1997:138). With the oil boom in the 1970s and 1980s, many Palestinians migrated to the Gulf states. Many, in the 1980s, migrated to Europe and North and South America. In 1991, after the Gulf War, Kuwait expelled between 300,000 and 350,000 Palestinians, the third largest dispersion of Palestinians (Farsoun and Zacharia 1997:139).

Occupation:

The Israeli military conquest of the West Bank and Gaza resulted in a succession of over 1,200 military orders put in place by Israel that controlled all aspects of daily life for Palestinians. These orders effectively created two systems of legal bodies (one applying to Israeli Jews, and the other to native Palestinians)³⁰ (Tamari 1993:27). By 1972, Palestinians registered for relief numbered 1.5 million, about half of the total Palestinian population. Of these, almost half were housed in refugee camps (P.A. Smith 1989:163).³¹

Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation culminated, in December of 1987, in what is now known as the first intifada. This unarmed resistance was extraordinarily costly for Palestinians. In its first five years, 1,283 Palestinians were killed, 130,472 sustained injuries requiring hospital treatment, 481 were deported, 22,088 were detained without charge, many of them tortured (Farsoun and Zacharia 1997:157). The Israeli High Court

³⁰ The intricate system of controlling the movement of Palestinians has extended to the colour of car license plates which distinguish drivers from the West Bank (Green), Gaza (Blue), and East Jerusalem (Yellow; Arab and Jewish residents of East Jerusalem are distinguishable through different numerical coding. Control was also established over water and other natural resources. The Israeli military authority was given the power to expropriate land and regulate municipal and village councils. Identity cards, travel permits, driving licenses, and licences for professional practices were instituted. Jordanian land laws were amended to facilitate the "transfer" of Arab lands to the control of Jewish settlement councils (constituting 60 percent of the total land area of the West Bank and Gaza). In 1979, Israeli law was extended to apply to Jewish settlers in the West Bank and Gaza, and from 1981 to the present Military Orders regulate fiscal policies of the West Bank and Gaza, including the collection of taxes and revenue, and the flow of funds to the territories (Tamari 1993:27). The first Palestinian intifada aimed as much at shaking off this administrative stranglehold as the more overt military aspects of the occupation.

³¹ The average floor space per person of United Nations-built refugee housing in Gaza is 27 to 35 square feet; the American Correctional Association's recommended floor space per prisoner in the United States is 60 square feet (Layoun 1992:415). Refugee camps in both the West Bank and Gaza typically have their entrances blocked with cement-filled barrels, restricting movement. It is not uncommon, also, for high fences to be erected around schools (in refugee camps as well as in towns) giving them a prison-like appearance and feel; the official reason is to prevent stone throwing at passing cars (Interview with an UNRWA official, Qalandia Refugee Camp, West Bank, 7 August, 1992).

legalised the use of force during interrogation. More than 100,000 acres of Palestinian land was confiscated and almost 200,000 olive trees uprooted. Frequent curfews were imposed, as well as blanket curfews on the entire West Bank and Gaza that lasted for weeks at a time. Some of this violence continued unabated after the subsequent signing of the 1993 Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinians.³²

Exile:

In general terms, the dispersion of Palestinians turned a nation of traditional, illiterate, agrarian farmers into dispersed communities that became proletarianised, urbanised and literate. The small pre-*nakba* commercial, and industrial middle class grew in the diaspora, with many Palestinians achieving renown as academics, scientists, physicians, surgeons, engineers, mathematicians, writers, business people and politicians, in both the Arab world as well as in North America and Europe (Farsoun and Zacharia 1997:140).

Nonetheless, the occupational opportunities, social structures, and political conditions faced by Palestinian communities varies widely between diaspora communities. With the exception of Jordan, Palestinians have not been granted citizenship and have an

³² The Oslo Accords, also known as the Declaration of Principles signed August 20, 1993, and its various successor agreements, uphold the right of self-determination for Palestinians and the need to address the issue of the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes. But, the agreement, like ones that have followed it, tied attainment of these rights to the outcome of negotiations between Israel, the occupying and vastly more powerful party, and Palestinians, who remain under an increasingly fierce Israeli military occupation.

uncertain legal status in their host countries in the Arab world.³³ In Lebanon, Palestinians are treated like foreign workers, subject to quotas in private companies and agencies. Work in the public sector and enrollment in the state university has been very limited. In 1950, Lebanon's labour minister "attempted to illegalize all employment of Palestinians" and by 1969 only one percent held official work permits (Farsoun and Zacharia 1997:154-55). Palestinians in Gulf states are subject to the fluctuations of the oil economy. As Janet Abu-Lughod notes, "their right to remain as residents has been conditional on their labor contributions. Upon retirement they must leave, and their children, even those born and brought up in the country of temporary residence, have no guaranteed right to remain behind... Thus, whereas the 'strangeness' of exile may be modified in these countries of common language and heritage, there remains the underlying anxiety of impermanence" (Abu-Lughod 1989:39).

Their resulting lack of psychological, social, economic, or political security is partially alleviated by a certain 'in-gathering'—in various diaspora—of clanspeople, kin, and co-villages to the same locations. Consequently, Palestinians in Arab host countries have typically socialised, worked, and become politically involved with other Palestinians. This relative segregation has meant that exiled Palestinian communities have been able to reproduce much of their pre-diaspora social and cultural features: distinct Arabic dialects, dress, and common social customs and folklore. This also enabled them to memorialise their shared loss of country, land, and livelihood and reinforced a common

³³ In the oil exporting states of the Gulf, Palestinians are treated as foreign guest workers, with no rights to citizenship, residence, owning a business or land, or participate in political life, whether they were born there or not (Farsoun and Zacharia 1997:155). In Lebanon, in addition to possessing no political rights to citizenship or residence, Palestinians are barred from dozens of categories of jobs.

consciousness (Farsoun and Zacharia 1997: 153-54). In his powerful memoir, Fawaz Turki explains both the alienation of a Palestinian as well as the turning inward that occurred in Palestinian diasporas:

If I was not a Palestinian when I left Haifa as a child, I am one now: Living in Beirut as a stateless person for most of my growing up years, many of them in a refugee camp, I did not feel I was living among my “Arab brothers.” I did not feel I was an Arab, a Lebanese, or, as some wretchedly pious writers claimed, a “southern Syrian.” I was a Palestinian. And that meant I was an outsider, an alien, a refugee and a burden. To be that, for us, for my generation of Palestinians, meant to look inward, to draw closer, to be part of a minority that had its own way of doing and seeing and feeling and reacting (Turki 1972:8).

All Palestinians, then, including those who remained in their homes in Israel, share in the trauma that befell Palestinian society. Palestinians have all experienced either expulsion from their homes and homeland, being born stateless and without rights, or with a stigmatised identity. As many as half a million Palestinians live in non-Arab countries (as Table 1 indicates) where, despite economic and social diversity and assimilation by some, the overwhelming majority have not detached themselves from the ethnic community (Abu-Lughod 1989:40). This attachment to a sense of Palestinianness is coupled, again, with a sense of alienation. As Abu-Lughod notes, “*all* Palestinians now exist in a painful state of physical and/or cultural exile, even those who never became refugees in the official sense of that term” (Abu-Lughod 1989:33). Estimates by Canadian Arab organizations suggest that about 70,000 Canadians are of Palestinian origin. As mentioned above, as diaspora communities become more differentiated from each other, their integration within Palestinian society in the future, *in situ*, is a potential challenge (Bowman 1994:147).

Table 1: Global Distribution of Estimated Current and Projected Numbers of the Palestinian People

Country	1986	1990/91	1995	2000
Jordan	1,398,050	1,824,179	2,170,101	2,596,986
West Bank / East Jerusalem	951,520	1,075,531	1,227,545	1,383,415
Gaza	545,100	622,016	726,832	837,699
Israel	608,200	730,000	800,755	919,453
Lebanon	271,434	331,757	392,315	463,067
Syria	242,474	301,744	357,881	410,599
Remaining Arab States	582,894	445,195	516,724	599,389
Rest of World	280,846	450,000	500,000	550,000
Total	4,880,518	5,7800,422	6,692,153	7,760,608

Source: *Facts and Figures About the Palestinians* (Washington, DC: Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine, 1992), p.4.

2.4 The contours of history: symbolism, form and content

The vast majority of our people are now thoroughly sick of the misfortunes that have befallen us. On the other hand, I have never met a Palestinian who is tired enough of being a Palestinian to give up entirely—Edward Said

Regardless of their style, artistic training and influence, generation, or cultural and geographic distance from historic Palestine, Palestinian artists continue to produce works of art that attempt to convey what it means to be a Palestinian. This section examines the changing form, content, and contexts of art produced by Palestinians.

The early part of the twentieth century saw a continuation of earlier traditions of calligraphy, painted icons, engravings on wood and mother of pearl, carvings in stone and olivewood, mosaics, pottery, weaving and straw work all continued. Pottery and

ceramics enjoyed a revival at the end of Ottoman rule.³⁴ Although these traditions are now known as handicrafts, they filled an artistic need, along with the patterns, colour schemes and stitchery of women's embroidery passed down through generations (El Khalidi 1999:47).

The design patterns used in these works consisted of abstract geometric elements and decorative floral shapes. The creation of new effects or styles was rare. The emphasis, rather, was on adhering to a particular pattern or theme. Palestinian artist and writer Samia Taktak Zaru notes that this was a conservatism and quietism in artistic expression that left no room for the emergence of renowned great artists (Zaru 1989:236). The local artist was "spontaneous and functional with a certain creative style which equalled the continuity of life itself, where parts fade away and new parts emerge taking on new forms, feelings and meanings" (Zaru 1989:236). Works were seen as the product of the group and family and their value lay in their aesthetics and in how well they reflected the culture, values, beliefs and traditions (Zaru 1989:235).

Photography as well as painting were also part of the artistic production in Palestine in these first decades of the twentieth century. Portraits and landscape painting were common, with women attracted to the latter "as a hobby rather than a career" (Zaru 1989:236).³⁵ Interestingly, Palestinian artists did not see the landscapes they inhabited as subject matter for their works (Sherwell 2003:58). Tina Sherwell notes that before

³⁴ The British Mandate period is seen as having contributed little to artistic development in Palestine as education was aimed at qualifying Palestinians to take up civil servant positions (Zaru 1989:236; Ali 1997:105).

1948, the landscapes that Palestinian artists did paint included images of snow capped mountains, lanes, evergreen trees, and rustic cottages. These would have been copied from books or postcards and imaged a European terrain (Sherwell 2003:59).

There are, though, irretrievable gaps in attempting to piece together the development of visual art, particularly painting, in the decades before 1948. Paintings were mainly commissioned to adorn interiors of homes and businesses. As a result, the evidence of their development was largely lost in 1948. Palestinians fled with the belief they would return in a matter of days or weeks, and so took only essential belongings with them. The material existence of 700,000 Palestinians, over half the population, including whole libraries, unfinished manuscripts, family histories and heirlooms, and works of art, disappeared into the hands of the new Jewish occupants of their homes, or else were buried in the rubble of bulldozers.

The history of art by the generation of Palestinian artists born at the turn of the twentieth century remains unwritten.³⁶ We do know that Palestinian painters had begun to assimilate Western precepts in Palestinian art (Boullata 1993:68). Visual art by

³⁵ For example, Sophie Halaby's "soft detailed watercolours of wild flowers of Palestine and landscapes" and Lydia Atta's paintings and sketches of domes and churches, are mentioned by Zaru (1989:236).

³⁶ The earliest known Palestinian artist Makhoul identifies is Nikola Al Sayeg (born in the mid-1800s) as the earliest known Palestinian artist, though Wijdan Ali contends that Hanna Musmar (1898-1988), a sculptor who lived in Nazareth, is the first individual who can be regarded as a Palestinian modern artist (Makhoul 1995:24; Ali 1997:106). From 1948, Mosmer's works focused on displacement, disappearance and events like the massacres at Deir Yassin and Kufr Kasim. Jamal Badran was born in Haifa in 1909 and was well known as a traditional craftsman of Islamic art, including calligraphy, pattern and geometry as well as ceramic, tapestries, and glass and metal work. In 1948, he fled to Damascus where he continued his traditional art (Makhoul 1995:25-26). Towfiq Jowharieh and Khalil Halaby (1889-1964) were early contemporaries (Boullata 1993:68). Fatima Muhib (b. 1920) was the first known Palestinian

Palestinians during the first half of the twentieth century was influenced by practices used in the production of crafts and applied arts such as the emphasis on perfecting a technical skill to reproduce a previous model. A good visual artist, like a craftsman, was judged on the basis of being able to reproduce a work. This is the context in which European fine art was introduced into Palestine. Early Palestinian painters tried to perfect techniques used in European art and introduced these to their communities (Makhoul 1995:24). This emphasis on reproducing technique does not preclude individuality, but is at odds with the high value placed on originality in western art discourse (Van Der Plas 2001:25).

As Sherwell states, the disjuncture between the two artistic modes and contexts is notable: "What we understand today as a definition of art is dominated by European modes of visual expression. When examining Palestinian visual arts it is important to recognize that the practice of creating paintings that were exhibited in a designated space and that were set apart in the community was not a traditional form of visual expression in the region" (Sherwell 2003:36-37). Nonetheless, artists in Palestine, along with those in the Arab world generally, were influenced by Western art practice and precepts. Orientalist artists established the first art school in the Arab world in Cairo in 1909, where many Palestinian artists studied (Makhoul 1995:21). Interestingly, though, because of the strong influence of Palestinian crafts, especially embroidery, young Palestinian artists were less keen than their Arab counterparts on Western art (Ali 1997:105).

woman to study art, graduating from the College of Fine Arts in Cairo in 1940 and obtaining her

Many of the Western artists studied by the students had themselves been influenced by the area in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Artists from Europe had been drawn to the Holy Land, wanting to portray the exotic with realism. Painters influenced by the area included Delacroix, Holman Hunt, Lewis, Renonir, Matisse, Oskar Kokoschka, Gros and Lear, who were part of such European art movements as Romanticism, Realism, Impressionism and early Modernism (Makhoul 1995:22). While there was a prejudice against 'native art' of the colonies, the avant-garde artists of the European capitals were disillusioned with the values of the West and looked eastward for inspiration from the late 19th century and onwards. The work of the Middle East, Africa and Oceania, was perceived by them as closer to an innocence and spontaneity that had been lost in European art. These artists also looked to 'native art' for forms which could be used to challenge the conventions of Renaissance perspective (Sherwell 2003:37). Painters who inclined towards modernism such as Klee, Matisse and Kokoschka influenced artists in the Arab world in general and in this way indirectly influenced Palestinian artists (Makhoul 1995:21-22).

The Zionist movement in the early twentieth century also provided a stimulus to Palestinian artists, according to Makhoul's interviews with the older generation of Palestinian artists, though Makhoul does not elaborate on how (Makhoul 1995:20). In the Arab world in general, uncritical imitation of Western artistic idioms gave way to an examination of "broad layers of forgotten images from civilizations forty centuries deep" (Boullata 1977:117). The works of Picasso, Klee and Matisse had pointed a new generation of Arab artists toward attempts to naturalise the borrowed aesthetic

vocabularies (in which painting sometimes became an adjunct to nationalism) and then toward personal fulfilment (Boullata 1977:117, 123). By the end of the Second World War, visual art in the Arab world reflected grapplings with issues of individualism and personal identity *versus* what is intrinsically Arab in art. The visual idiom itself, in Boullata's words, with its movement toward "individualist vision in a verbally oriented society by itself could qualify as a heroic act of defiance" (Boullata 1977:117, 123).

In Palestine, this process was cut short by the events of 1948: In Boullata's words, "an embryonic art movement under native skies, based on the assimilation of Western models, was killed right at birth" (Boullata 1993:68). The upheaval of the war severed people's relationship to the land, the source of their livelihood, and crippled their social structure and identity. The social systems supporting the production of art were destroyed, and Palestinian artists found themselves in different conditions and circumstances. Those who remained in Israel were made to feel they did not belong there. They were suddenly a minority group, prevented from leaving their village or town without a permit, overwhelmed by an alien state, cut off from the Arab world, and deprived of the feeling of belonging (Makhoul 1995:26). Artists in the West Bank and Gaza remained in their cultural context, but were overwhelmingly influenced by the events of 1948.

Palestinian artists who found themselves in the Arab diaspora tended to be influenced by, and in turn influenced, the art movements of their respective 'host' countries—although some, including Ismail Shammout, Samia Zaru, Samira Badran, and Kamal Boullata kept their identity in the diaspora and continue to be identified as Palestinians

(Ali 1997:107). Several Palestinian artists who had studied at the Cairo School of Applied Art during the 1930s had become teachers of crafts, design, and art education in Palestine and other Arab states (Ali 1997:105).³⁷ Others became better known for their writing (such as Ghassan Kanafani and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra) (Boullata 1993:68).

While the West Bank was under Jordanian rule and Gaza under Egyptian control, Palestinian artists were able to study in new art schools that had opened up in Baghdad, Beirut, and Cairo. Students at these schools were exploring forms of artistic expression derived as much from Arab culture as from Impressionism in Paris, Futurism in Italy and Expressionism in Germany. Palestinian refugee students adopted the methodologies and approaches of their host nations, but their subject matter was distinct from their fellow students and largely concerned their homeland (Makhoul 1995:29-30). Common themes and symbolism are apparent within works of art produced across dispersed Palestinian communities, and these included resistance, nationalism, homeland and identity.³⁸

Kamal Boullata identifies four stylistic approaches that eventually became apparent in works by Palestinian artists: illustrative/romantic, narrative, surrealism and fantasy, and lyrical. Each had strong links to literature and folklore, and corresponded with changes occurring in literary genres in the Arab world (Makhoul 1995:30). These categories are

³⁷ These include Abed Badran, Khairy Badran, Mohammed Wafa Al Dajani, Faysel Al Taha, Khalil Bedouieh, Najati Al Ammam al Hussein, Daoud Al Jaouni, and Sharif Al Khadra (Makhoul 1995:27).

³⁸ Interestingly, while images of "the Arab" were a persistent theme in art by Israeli artists, "the Israeli" has never been a subject or object of Palestinian art. The "Arab" native in Israeli art is often in the form of his diminution or absence, not unlike Orientalist photographers who either

not comprehensive but reflect the attempt on the part of artists, argues Makhoul, to appeal to the Palestinian population in exile to keep alive the image and impression of Palestine, and to ensure an awareness of the existence of Palestine and the cultural traits of its population (Makhoul 1995:35).

The illustrative/romantic style was the most popular style during the 1950s and 1960s, and is evident in Amin Shammout's images of the *nakba* (looked at in Chapter Three). This style is mostly figurative and realist, and strongly resonates with the Arab oral tradition, poetry and legends. Its amenity to direct interpretation, meant that it could carry narratives of the political and humanitarian concerns of Palestinians after the *nakba*. These works helped to create a sense of collective loss for Palestinians. Their dissemination was aided by the Palestine Liberation Organization, that appointed Ismail Shammout (Amin Shammout's cousin whose work is looked at in Chapter Three) as head of its propaganda campaign to mobilise the Palestinian refugee population (Boullata 1993:69). Many homes in refugee camps and elsewhere had posters of Ismail Shammout's paintings on their wall, and the figurative style was adopted by many young artists. However, by the watershed year of 1967, a younger generation of Palestinian artists living mostly in exile was eager to explore artistic horizons beyond the limits of the Shammouts' style of narrative iconography (Boullata 1993:69).

Ismail Shammout's paintings, though, mark a significant turning point in Palestinian art, argues Sherwell, in that they mark the beginning of artists' perception of the landscape, often the landscapes of their experiences, as a distinct genre of representation (Sherwell

portrayed the vast landscape devoid of inhabitants or rendered them more grand by the

2003:63). Sherwell suggests that “it is noteworthy that Palestinian artists did not create representations of the war of 1948 (in fact this whole aspect of history painting is absent in Palestinian art), rather the focus of art works was upon the emotional experience of the loss of the land” (Sherwell 2003:63). One of the central aspects of these paintings, which Sherwell calls “*nakba* landscapes” is the depiction of wandering in lands of exile and of being in an unfamiliar terrain (Sherwell 2003:64).

The three other distinct approaches identified by Makhoul include a narrative approach used by refugees who tended to have less academic training. These paintings portrayed images and traditions in Palestine from the artists’ memory and tended to be more naïve and less realistic than those painted in the illustrative/romantic style described above.

Surrealism and fantasy is found in yet another group of painters who draw on rich literatures and poetry of the Arab world, as well as the ‘gothic’ horror of Western sources. Finally, a lyrical style portrays statuesque figures in village environments, with simple stylization that influenced artists of later generations (such as Tayseer Barakat and Jawad al Malhi, whose works are mentioned below) (Makhoul 1995:32-34).

Evident in the works by Palestinian painters in Israel is a more abstract and Western influenced approach. Interestingly, Palestinian painters in Israel also draw more directly on Palestinian village arts and crafts such as embroidery, textiles and straw weaving (Makhoul 1995:32-35).

The oral tradition:

Palestinian artists draw on the strong oral tradition in Arab culture. Poetry, story telling, folksongs all expressed Palestinian social and cultural life. The role of Islam and the practice of teaching the Qur'an through memorization has tended to reinforce the importance of the oral tradition. According to artist and critic, Kamal Boullata, the course of Palestinian visual art was predetermined by the strength of the oral tradition (Boullata 1993:68). As Boullata notes that,

Traditionally, Arab creativity revolved around The Word: the word as spoken revelation and as visible image. Poetry, being the elixir of language, was the natural art form in which Arabs excelled. On the visual plane, the arabesque became the...[visual] product of Arabic (Boullata 1977:107).

For some artists, the visual patterns of Arabic language or Islamic design, and for others the sound of vernacular narrative was the source of visual idiom (Boullata 1993:69).

This connection to the word, be it spoken or illustrative, prefigures a connection between sound and image that is found in the inspiration of the three artists discussed in Chapter Three. The medium of words is also employed by Palestinian visual artists to articulate and navigate the meaning of distance from their birthplace (Boullata 1993:69). In Boullata's words,

To one artist, a page of contemporary Arabic may evoke a visual inspiration that competed with the imagery of words; to another, the very sound of the vernacular narrative may become the source of a visual idiom. While some artists explored the general visible manifestations of traditional patterns, other artists could identify a spatial experience only with the specificity of place names. From his or her cultural perspective each artist was attempting to articulate the meaning of distance from one's own birthplace (Boullata 1993:69).

Indeed, in all forms of activities and artistic expressions by Palestinians, the written or spoken word remains dominant. In theatre, it is dialogue more than action that creates meaning. The tradition of the word as cultural embodiment of religion, art, and identity provided for a profusion of shared symbols between artists and audiences (Michail-Ashrawi 1993:102).

Literary images are used metaphorically in paintings by Palestinians. Boullata suggests that these images are less illustrative than allegorical. For example, the tragic fate of literary characters depicted in visual images would allude to a similar fate of Palestinian refugees. Shared imagery and their allegorical use in the visual field have served to extend the horizons of the Palestinian narrative, as well as the narrative function of the visual field (Boullata 1993:70).³⁹ At the same time, words in the form of place names, literary imagery, and images inspired by the sound of Arabic vernacular function to articulate the meaning of distance from one's birthplace. Palestinian visual art thus created its audience out of art traditions emanating from culture and language (rather than nature and space, which have been the artistic preoccupations of Western and Israeli contexts). In the process, artists found ways of narrating space (Boullata 1993:67-68).

³⁹ As Boullata recounts, Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani's novella, *Men in the Sun*, narrates the story of three Palestinians in refugee camps who follow their dream of finding work in Kuwait only to suffocate to death in the drum of an empty water tank of a truck. A series of paintings by artist Abed Abedi of Haifa illustrate the book, but are themselves less illustrative than allegorical. The fate of the refugees, in other words, is "not unlike the suffocation of the Palestinians following the declaration of the Jewish state...through Kanafani's Arabic Abedi brings Kuwait to Haifa, and in the process his art extends the horizon of the Palestinian narrative" (Boullata 1993:70).

Gender in the imaging of Palestine:

The long oral tradition also fosters associations between peasant songs and images of the landscape and of the ideal woman as mother or bride (Boullata 1990:60).⁴⁰ The village and peasantry has been a recurring theme through which artists render the past and future of Palestine. Within this framework, the village woman came to symbolise an ideal of national resistance—remaining steadfast on the land in the face of Israeli occupation.

Palestinian artist Tayseer Barakat explains how, for Palestinians, imaginings of the land and nation are linked to those of the woman and, in particular, the mother:

Palestinians have an organic relationship to their land. Experiences, existential notions and doctrines cumulatively mediate this relationship in their poetry and literature, and in their graphic productions. The themes of Palestinian embroidery are inspired by the contours of the land, and by its fauna and flora. It is not surprising that Palestinians identify their land with the image of the Mother... She personifies the violated homeland, but also the tenacious defiance of oppression. She is always a poetic dream flying in search of freedom. Hardly any works by Palestinian graphic artists lack a representation of women. The expressive and thematic forms of these representations are dominated by a silent sorrow which underlies a call for defiance. These themes of rebellion recur incessantly in legends and folk tales of the Levant; beginning with the story of Eve, and reappearing in the legends of Ashterot, symbol of fertility, and Isis, who collects the remains of Ozores in order to restore right and justice. She is the immortal emanation which embodies the patrimony of humankind and earth. She is the womb, and the threshing floor, and the perennial source of life (Tayseer Barakat quoted in Makhoul 1995:69-70).

⁴⁰ Palestinian artist Kamal Boullata's study of Palestinian children's drawings and paintings attests to the strength of this tradition. Boullata found that children in refugee camps who had never seen the fields their parents cultivated before 1948, and having grown up in the midst of the Intifada, draw scenes of pastoral calm with women drawing water from wells in villages and carrying them in painted jugs on their heads (Boullata 1990:59).

Invariably, political-cultural projects and the position of women are inextricably linked, as women's roles come to symbolise demarcations of the nation (Yuval-Davis, Anthias and Cain 1992:36).⁴¹ Sherwell notes that, "More than any other member of the community the peasant woman in traditional dress has come to be a marker of national identity" (Sherwell 2001:68).⁴² Interestingly, Palestinians artists have tended to remove male figures from their depictions of the village, creating a community of women and children. The effect has been to create a subject-viewing position that is one of paternalism. In Sherwell's words, "The viewer then comes to occupy a paternalist position interpolated to care for these lone women and children, and their village. Thus, in effect, the viewer is safeguarding Palestine and its future" (Sherwell 2001:67).

Imagery of the village and the Palestinian village woman corresponds with national discourses as well as literary productions that image the Palestinian nation as a woman. In the political discourse of Palestine during the 1940s, and to a greater extent following 1948, Palestine was imagined as a bride (Sherwell 2001:64). After 1948, the metaphor of woman became more widespread in literature as well as in visual art. This was not as much an adherence to Palestinian traditional culture as much as the creation of a "culture of resistance" (Peetet 1993:50). In Palestine, the severity of Israeli hegemony and military occupation has increased the tendency for politico-religious groups to cast

⁴¹ This, of course, stretches back at least to the French Revolution where 'Marianne' symbolised the model woman of the French nation (Moghadam 1993:94).

⁴² This imaging has sometimes led to wider social roles for women. For example, After the *nakba*, there was a revival of Palestinian embroidery fostered by women's charitable organizations working in the West Bank and Gaza, which provided women with incomes while affirming Palestinian identity. Embroidery stitches also articulated women's own voice in relation to political developments of the time, as new embroidery stitches found their way into traditional patterns, provided a running commentary of women's views on political developments. The 'dead-end-road' stitch denoted women's rejection of the Camp David Accords; and the 'two-snakes' stitch represented women's feelings about Begin and Sadat (Najjar 1992:147).

women as cultural signifiers of the Palestinian nation. In Sayigh's words, Israeli hegemony, "seen as 'modern' and 'Western,' has strengthened ideological countercurrents that place false emphasis on 'our' women remaining 'traditional'" (Sayigh 1989:490).

Significantly, Sherwell notes, images of women in paintings by Palestinian artists in the West Bank and Gaza are changing. The 'bride of Palestine' is being replaced by images of women as human beings (for example, Jawad Al Malhi's *The Bride*, 1990). Referring to painting by artists in the West Bank and Gaza, Sherwell asserts that "Palestinian painting has witnessed the disappearance of the woman and, more specifically, the mother" and, since the arrival of President Arafat, they are being replaced by images of Palestine as a Fatherland (Sherwell 2001:71).

Art and occupation:

When Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, artists suddenly faced restrictions on travel, as well as a proliferation of Israeli military orders that governed every aspect of their lives. One of these, Military Order No. 101, Article 6, to be precise, prohibited residents of the West Bank from printing or publishing "any publication, advertisement, proclamation, picture or any other document" that had "political significance" (Sherwell 2001:65). Printing was defined as including photography, numbers, symbols, maps, decorations and painting.⁴³ Artistic or public

⁴³ As cited in Raja Shehadeh's *Occupier's Law: Israel and the West Bank*, Washington D.C.: Institute of Palestine Studies, p. 57, and quoted from Sherwell (2001), p. 65.

displays of the colours of the Palestinian flag (red, black, green, and white), in addition to images of the flag itself, and the word “Palestine” were also banned.⁴⁴

Artists were also arrested for images that conveyed a sense of closeness to the land, such as a painting by artist Sliman Mansour that depicts an old refugee man carrying Jerusalem on his back. The image was inspired by a poem by Ahmad Dahbour entitled, “The Camel of Burdens,” and the Israeli army arrested Mansour for its supposed subversion (Bartelt 1996:21). Such images create memories and a social context for collective memories. Sherwell notes that “the idealised Palestine becomes almost a burden, not dissimilar to the heavy load that Mansour’s wanderer carries on his back” (Sherwell 2003:68). Like many others, the image was reproduced and distributed in poster form by Palestinians outside the West Bank (Bartelt 1996:21). Benedict Anderson’s seminal work, *Imagined Communities*, notes the importance of printed material in creating a shared sense of identity, a shared imagined nation. Sherwell suggests that poster art in Palestine served the function of printed material in that they circumvented Israeli censors to reach remote villages and create a shared language of national identity and struggle (Sherwell 2003:58).

A number of symbols were imaged in these works, including chains, clenched fists, prison bars, guns, wheat, doves in profile, muscular arms, flowers, martyrs, the map of Palestine, village scenes, women’s embroidered dress, the Palestinian flag, *al hamsa*

⁴⁴ On a research trip to the West Bank in 1992, I discovered, after one of my counterparts did not arrive for a meeting, that Palestinians were interrogated and arrested for wearing a piece of jewellery decorated with a three by two millimetre replica of the Palestinian flag. Thus, aside from the artistic and political renditions of Palestinian symbols, individuals’ bodies were also sites of expression and resistance.

(the palm of the hand and fingers), the eye, and ceramic pots. These images continue to trigger automatic recognition amongst Palestinian viewers (Makhoul 1995:57). Some of these images, such as scenes of idyllic villages, formed part of a vocabulary of representations that Palestinian artists created that could be understood by the Palestinian community, argues Sherwell, and yet avoid the harsh reprisals from the Israeli authorities against overt expressions of a Palestinian identity (Sherwell 2003:151). Images of idealized landscape drew on the figure of the peasant, which had become a powerful signifier for the nation in political discourse and in cultural expressions. As anthropologist Ted Swedenburg notes, “[t]hrough identification with the figure of the peasant a scattered population acquired a sense of itself as a community with roots in a specific place” (Swedenberg 1990:24).

These images of idealized village scenes (usually with women and children), and the lone (male) peasant on his land or longing for it, created a shared sense of belonging to place that, in turn, functioned to create and maintain a sense of collective identity amongst Palestinians in their various diasporas. As Sherwell points out, within these images,

The diversity of localism is accommodated within the discourse of belonging to the nation in which each person is represented as hailing from a particular place in the landscape. It is the sum of all these places that makes up the nation (Sherwell 2003:147).

The bond with place—in fact, with a diversity of different places—created a means of belonging to the nation and a strategy of resistance as it bolstered historical claims of rights to the land (Sherwell 2003:147).

Because images produced by the artists had embedded within them symbols of national identity and struggle, artists and galleries and exhibition sites were targeted by the Israeli military authorities during the 1970s and 80s. In 1979, the Jordan-based Palestinian Artists Association (PAA) created chapters in Jerusalem and Ramallah and held exhibits of works by, among others, Nabil Anani, Suleiman Mansour, Isam Badr, and Tayseer Sharaf. Because of the nationalist subjects depicted in their works, the Israeli authorities halted the PAA's activities and closed down its branches. Israeli authorities also detained some of the artists, confiscated their works and prohibited all exhibitions by PAA members (Ali 1997:110). The Association continued to hold exhibits where there were large Palestinian diaspora communities. Also in 1979, Gallery 79 opened, the only art gallery in the Occupied Territories. A year later it too was shut down. Several artists were arrested, and one, Fathi Ghabn, spent six months in an Israeli prison in 1984 for using the colours of the flag in a painting (Ali 1997:110-11). Another artist, Al Moghani, was imprisoned for three years (Makhoul 1995:52).

In the absence of galleries in the West Bank and Gaza during the 1970s and 80s, most Palestinian art was printed as posters and postcards, and also as publication covers, calendars, leaflets and T-shirts. Interestingly, these were available in the late 1980s (and perhaps before) in Palestinian stores in Jerusalem. They are purchased as expressions of national identity rather than for aesthetic reasons (Shinar 1987:149). And, in absence of gallery spaces, "hundreds upon hundreds of Palestinians" still managed to attend exhibitions in the 1970s and early 1980s in schools, union offices and villages throughout the West Bank and Gaza (Murphy 1990:125). Palestinian artist Vera Tamari

recounted to Jay Murphy that, “[t]he people were thirsty for that sort of thing” (Murphy 1990:125).

The first Intifada:

Not surprisingly, resistance to occupation is a consistent theme in the work of artists in the West Bank and Gaza. During the first Intifada (from 1987 to 1993), a general politicization of cultural forms occurred. This, however, presented a peculiar “career dilemma” for many artists (Makhoul 1995:98). Artists had to choose between self-indulgent aspirations or expressions of cultural identity and nationhood, as expressed by Palestinian artist Suliman Mansour:

how would I deal with personal ideas, and fantasies that are unique to myself and produce work accordingly and then exhibit them in a camp that only last night had two people killed? I would be embarrassed to show such works, as I would have no response to them under these circumstances. I am not saying that artists are supposed to reflect their society, but they should be affected by their environment (Makhoul 1995:98-99).

During the Intifada, there was increased use of the colours of the Palestinian flag and greater detention and imprisonment of artists who painted in these colours. One artist, Adnan Zobeidi was imprisoned in 1992 for painting a portrait of Gassan Kanafani, Palestinian painter, poet writer and politician, who was assassinated in 1972 by Israel. Israeli authorities continued to imprison artists and most were taken in for questioning at one time or another. Not surprisingly, the Israeli army appeared more frequently in artists’ works (Makhoul 1995:94-95).

As mentioned, the intifada did provide for increased creativity within artistic expression. For example, a boycott of Israeli goods was part of the intifada's strategy of self-sufficiency; this led to the use of local materials and explorations of what constituted Palestinian cultural expression identity. In Makhoul's words, the search for local materials prompted artists to re-investigate "in a more scientific manner the history and origins of their traditions and crafts. Many artists have been rediscovering the traditional methods of creating works of art, for example by making explorations into national pigments and craft skills" (Makhoul 1995:97). Artists used materials from construction sites, canvas flour bags, scraps of clothing, hay, mud, straw, local flora, locally found clay, kohl and earth for colouration, olive wood, and spray paint (adapting its use from graffiti) (Makhoul 1995:82-90). Artists were, in effect, consciously redefining the answer to the question that introduces this chapter, 'what is 'Palestine?' and, further, examining the role of the artist in articulating Palestinian national identity.

Sherwell explains this move to use local materials as also representing a shift in the position from which artists painted. She notes that, "[w]hat seemed to occur was a move towards a closer proximity with the landscape and a treatment of landscape *per se* as material from which to create representations... The natural and found materials [used by these artists] functioned as indexes of place; through their use artists were in a sense fetishizing these materials precisely because of the embodied associations that they carried of both place and landscape" (Sherwell 2003:80). A sense of locality, place and rootedness was created through both the subject represented, in particular village life and rural utopia, as well as through the actual materials used. These experiments opened

the way for a diversification in the way artists expressed a sense of identity and belonging (Sherwell 2003:80, 81).

Along with this experimentation were constraints regarding the artist's role in relation to the national struggle. For example, Hanan Mikhail-Ashrawi notes that during the first Palestinian intifada, from 1987 to the early 1990s, "Commitment to the national cause and assertion of national identity [became] the basic components and goals of cultural activities and the acid test of their 'relevance'" (Mikhail-Ashrawi 1993:101). The individual voice, in that context, became "conspicuously absent from all forms of cultural expression and discourse" unless it conveyed a "collective significance rather than a narrow personal focus" (Mikhail-Ashrawi 1993:101). Nonetheless, as mentioned above, this focus has served to invigorate cultural productions, providing a "vitalising influence" and contributed to the creation of an original and experimental cultural movement in Palestine (Mikhail-Ashrawi 1993:104). The confidence and optimism that characterised the Intifada had also given artists courage to experiment (Murphy 1990:120).

Many of the symbols employed by Palestinian artists have elements in common with Mexican Socialist realist artists such as Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros. Like Mexican artists, Palestinians use art as a tool for communication and education (Shinar 1987:132-150). Art by Palestinians is also produced from within Israeli prison cells. Prison art is a phenomenon unique to Palestinian artists, some of whom use white handkerchiefs and smuggled crayons to

depict emotionally charged compositions that incorporate realistic, symbolic, Surrealist, Expressionist, and naïve styles (Ali 1997:111-12).

The establishment of Palestinian political and cultural institutions have provided for greater opportunities for artists to exhibit and travel abroad. Since the beginning of the peace process, galleries and art centres have opened, including the Wasiti Art Centre in Jerusalem, Ziryab café/art gallery and the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Centre in Ramallah, the Rashad Shawa Cultural Center in Gaza (which is the largest cultural institution in Arab Palestine and houses exhibition halls, a theatre, auditoriums and a public library), and the Mamal Foundation for Contemporary Art in Jerusalem.

Palestinian artists in Israel:

Relative to the numbers of artists in the West Bank and Gaza, there are few practising Palestinian artists in Israel. With separate school systems for Jewish and Palestinian students, Palestinian students do not generally have access to art training in junior or high schools (Ali 1997:108). Although Palestinian artists in Israel do have access to Israeli art institutes at post-secondary studies, it is limited by a discriminatory quota system, and affected by the lack of earlier education (Makhoul 1995:51).⁴⁵ For Palestinian artists in Israel, the “newly imported aesthetics [in Israel] carried a different visual vocabulary and slightly alien conceptions which needed time and modification in order to enter Palestinian sensibilities” (Makhoul 1995:38).

⁴⁵ The Israeli art school, Betsalel School of Art, in Jerusalem accepted Jewish students almost exclusively, with only four Palestinian students having studied there from the 1950s through the 1970s (Makhoul 1995:40).

As an ethnic minority in the new state, Palestinians in Israel have been prevented from making contact with other Palestinians outside Israel. Their isolation from the Arab world remains profound. Additionally, their artistic development was hampered by restrictions on expressing ideas critical of the State of Israel (Makhoul 1995:37). While they have Israeli identity cards, passports and voting rights and are partially enmeshed into the Israeli way of life, they are treated with suspicion by Israelis. This has created an identity crisis for Palestinian Israelis and is exacerbated for those, including Bashir Makhoul, whose work is discussed in Chapter Three, and who joined the Israeli Artists Association. The Israeli Artists Association does not recognize Palestinian artists as Palestinian (Makhoul 1995:110-11).⁴⁶ Nonetheless, though not without difficulty, almost all Palestinian artists in Israel confirm their Palestinian cultural identity and maintain some indigenous element in their work (Ali 1997:109). Others have emigrated abroad.⁴⁷

Palestinians in Israel benefit from support for exhibitions, sales of works, grants, awards, publicity, and are “allowed” to represent Israel at international artistic events such as the Venice Biennial. Nonetheless, Makhoul notes, Israelis pigeon-holed their work as “ethnic” art (Makhoul 1995:44). Makhoul elaborates that, on one hand, Israelis will expect Palestinian artists to deal with political issues, because of the political

⁴⁶ Their identity cards, in fact, identify them as “Arab,” giving Palestinians a racial identity whereas others are classed under religion (Druse and Jews) (Makhoul 1995:114). Further, Makhoul notes, “to describe the Palestinian identity as “Arab” is equivalent to describing the Welsh as “European.” Though true, the description implicitly and probably deliberately reduces the nationalistic claims of the people by masking their specific political and cultural heritage by a generalised, ethnic one” (Makhoul 1995:114).

situation. On the other hand, their work has to be filtered and modified to conform to the criteria of Israeli consciousness. The result is a “fragmented” stylistic approach, with subject matter or materials from their own cultural context rendered through art idioms that can be appreciated by the Jewish Israeli public (Makhoul 1995:44, 50). Overtly political art by Palestinians would be ignored by the Israeli viewer as not being art and contrary to Zionist ideology (Ali 1997:109).

Palestinian artists in Western diasporas:

Palestinians artists living in the West face a different set of problems than those of their counterparts in the West Bank, Israel, and the Arab diaspora. Israeli military occupation in the West Bank and Gaza, cultural alienation and third-class citizenship in Israel, or tenuous legal status in the Arab world, are replaced with newly acquired residency status and citizenship rights. They are exiles as well as immigrants—embodying both a nostalgia for what is lost and a directedness toward the host culture (JanMohamed 1992). The form and content of works by Palestinian artists living in Europe and North America sometimes also reflect the artists’ navigations through multiple diasporas.

Palestinian artists live and work within a similar cultural displacement as that experienced by their Arab counterparts. Art historian Fran Lloyd notes that Arab artists living in the West, although often educated within a Western art system, are often refused access to the exhibition spaces of Western modernity and denied a place in its

⁴⁷ Such as Jamal Beyari from Jaffa, Ibrahim Ibrahim from Raini near Nazareth, and Abed Younis and Daher Zidani who immigrated to the United States, Japan, and Germany, respectively (Makhoul 1995:44).

history. At the same time, they practice outside of ‘traditional’ art customs (Lloyd 2001:14). Lloyd concludes that these artists are “doubly displaced through modernity and tradition” (Lloyd 2001:14). I argue, as noted above, that the displacement of Arab and, in this case, Palestinian artists in the West does not constitute a displacement from ‘modernity.’ Rather, artists’ use of the medium of painting continues an historical engagement with the precepts of Western art forms within the cultural contexts of Arab traditions.

The artists examined in Chapters Three, Four, and Five live in three different Western multicultural societies – Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Official multicultural policy in Canada influences discursive and physical spaces of art exhibition. Multicultural art galleries funded by provincial and municipal governments imply and also foster ethnicity as a primary identity marker. In the United States, Arabs are officially defined as White and are, hence, not officially considered an ethnic minority (Nashashibi 2001:34-35).⁴⁸ Nonetheless, they face negative stereotypes in the media. Art historian Salwa Mikdadi Nashashibi notes that “dehumanization and alienation of Americans of Arab descent escalates with every conflict in Arab regions that involves American intervention” (Nashashibi 2001:35).

In general, there is a lack of a shared frame of reference or discourse with which audiences can engage with a mixing of Western, Islamic, and Arab influences. In addition, the presentation of anything Palestinian can invoke the narrow framework within which the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is conceived. The result, according to

sociologist Basima Ahmad Ahed, is an increasing identification with Palestinian culture and subjectivity on the part of Palestinian Americans (Ahed 1995:86). Palestinians born one or two generations after the cataclysmic events of 1948 are removed from the land and culture of their origin by geography as well as time. Nonetheless, as Ahed notes,

Despite differences between first and second generation Palestinians, in terms of political values...there were no significant differences between first and second generation American-born Palestinians in terms of their commitment to the 'Palestinian cause' and their attachment to the land (Ahed 1995:iv).

Tunisian artist Sabiha Khemir suggests that, "[t]he challenge we Arabs face is to work out how we are going to integrate the Arab experience in the modern consciousness of the world" (Khemir 2001:50). Palestinian artists in the West face this general Arab burden of challenging and recreating representations of the 'other' in the West. They also face the additional alienation caused by the rupture of exile and an unresolved and misunderstood national struggle. Nashashibi explains,

In spite of the universal themes in Palestinian art, it is often usually misinterpreted as political propaganda. While a similar exhibition from other minority cultures may be addressed in a straightforward manner, Palestinian culture is at a disadvantage in the United States (Mikdadi-Nashashibi nd).

While I would contest Nashashibi's notion that other minority cultures are perceived in a straightforward manner, Palestinian artistic expression in Canada must navigate discourses of Canadian multiculturalism and Eurocentrism. I examine how these discourses come into play in the following three chapters and elaborate more specifically in Chapter Six on notions of tolerance and Canadian values that are embedded in discourses and policies of Canadian multiculturalism. In the next chapter,

⁴⁸ Except in San Francisco in which a 1999 City Council decision gave them minority status (Nashashibi 2001:34-35).

Chapter Three, I focus on how the diaspora location of the artists' production provides both distance from the context of Palestinian national struggle as well as a renewed engagement with it. The discussion focuses on selected works of art by four Palestinian artists. The diverse styles and subject matter of the works reflect, I argue, different dimensions of Palestinian subjectivity and cultural memory. Exhibition and viewing sites are also looked at also in terms of how their implied discourses shape viewers' engagements with Palestinian narratives.

CHAPTER THREE
BELONGING AND MEMORY IN VISUAL ART
BY PALESTINIAN ARTISTS IN THE WEST

As noted in Chapter One, works of art and their signification enable artists and audiences to critically locate themselves in the world and actively challenge or change it (Araeen 2000:8-9). This chapter examines works of visual art by artists of Palestinian origin. I look at paintings, photography, and installation pieces by four Palestinian artists living in Western diasporas. The art works reflect cultural and social contexts of the artists' lives, various artistic influences, and wider historical connections and conditions. I look at the art for insight into ways in which images and the meanings they engender reflect and reconstitute places of memory and identity.

The focus of the analysis is a selection of works by four artists. The meaning of their works comes from their articulation with wider Palestinian artistic productions, as well as localized spaces of exhibition. The efficacy of the works is created through the imagery and its symbolism, as well as by places of exhibitions, discourses of identity and belonging, and audience engagements. My analysis focuses on the performativity of the works—that is, their efficacy in enacting identities and creating social spaces for individual and collective narratives.

The works by Zahi Khamis, Abdul Hadi Shala, Amin Shammout and Bashir Makhoul, I suggest, reflect and create different Palestinian historical and contemporary narratives. In different ways, the images and styles employed by the artists 'translocate' both artists

and viewers. The works represent links between various exile contexts. For example, Shammout's early works were painted while he lived in Cairo and Kuwait and contributed to the constitution of Palestinian national memory in the 1970s and 1980s. In Nova Scotia, a quarter century later, these works transpose the Palestinian collective memory onto the Canadian multicultural context. The sites in which the works are exhibited also perform the works of art. I try to understand the efficacy of the works for different audiences by examining jottings in guestbooks, visitors' comments at exhibition sites, reviews, exhibition discourses (implied or overt), artists' own narratives, and previous exhibition spaces.

The four artists do not constitute a self-defined group. What the artists have in common is their reference to some or many images and symbols associated with Palestinian national and cultural identity. This symbolism is inferred in some works and more overt in others. Each of the artists is continually evolving in their terms of style and subject matter they present. I look at a small selection of each of their works as a way of examining ways in which symbols, images and narratives of Palestinian identity are created through art in contexts that are culturally and geographically removed from the cultural context of Palestine. Two of the artists, Amin Shammout and Abdul Hadi Shala live in Canada. Bashir Makhoul lives in England. And Zahi Khamis lives in the United States.

Their works are, in part, political and aesthetic contest and "acts of will and memory" (hooks 1995:xv). That is, they represent engagements with the history of colonization and subjugation experienced by Palestinians. As bell hooks notes about art by

marginalized peoples, the creation of art is a form of undoing of the work of subjugation and colonization. This is not to imply that their works are significant *only* as revolt, which is too often considered the ultimate mark of works of art produced by artists from marginal groups (hooks 1995:103). The works represent means through which the artists negotiate belonging out-of-place and critically engage with the world.

In this way, I confer with hooks' statement that, "[a]esthetics is more than a philosophy or theory of art and beauty; it is a way of inhabiting space, a particular location, a way of looking and becoming" (hooks 1990:104). Art and the ways of looking and becoming that it engenders take place at particular junctures of aesthetic and social (including institutional and political) processes. These processes shape ways in which art is signified. Further, each viewer's engagement with the works is shaped by their location in terms of class, gender, generation, religion, race, exile experiences, and so on. Necessarily, there are endless possible readings of works of art. As one of the artists examined below, Bashir Makhoul, states,

There is never only one reading of my work, and I do not like to impose a meaning and explanation upon a viewer. When I have talked to people about my work they have given many interesting and valid interpretations, and this is something I want to encourage (Makhoul 1995:175).

Art, also, suggests meaning without defining it. At its most effective, it is "a terrain of defamiliarization" in that it can "take on what we see/know and make us look at it in a new way" (hooks 1990:4). The works are interesting in terms of the meanings they engender, as well as the defamiliarizations they produce.

3.1 A trajectory of links between art, memory, and belonging

A sample of each artist's work is reproduced in the chapter. The works represent different aspects of a spectrum, if you will, of negotiation and contestation. I refer to this spectrum as a trajectory. The notion of a spectrum or trajectory occurred to me during fieldwork when the works of art seemed to represent various aspects of one story. The story is not of Palestine, or of Palestinian artistic expression. Rather, it is of the different ways that art functions as a means by which Palestinians in exile situate themselves in and through transnational politics and transcultural belonging.

The trajectory functions as a heuristic structure through which to suggest connections between the images and their symbolism, the styles of the works, exhibition sites, discourses of Palestinian identity and multiculturalism, artists' biographies and border crossings, and historical conditions. While trajectories imply a progressive development, there is no progression from one style to another, or from 'naïve' art to more 'sophisticated' art, that is implied in this organization of the works.

The works are examined, primarily, as sites of mediation between place, art, and identity: places of exile and exhibition, aesthetic styles and forms, and critical engagements on the part of artists and audiences. In this mediation, both identity and art are performed and enacted through, in Homi Bhabha's words, "displacements of memory and the indirections of art" (Bhabha 1994a:18).

The four artists whose works are featured below are from three different generations, currently live in three different exile contexts (being, as mentioned, Canada, the United

States, and England), and have had very distinct biographical and artistic trajectories. Their use of symbols and imagery reflects their very diverse training and artistic influences. For example, Shammout's paintings of the *nakba* were completed at a time before postmodern artistic styles. Shammout's works give shape to the grand narratives of Palestinian dispossession and cultural origins, using a figurative style that is particularly effective as narrative illustration. Shala's paintings reflect the influence of Picasso's cubist style and portray a progression of social forms of resistance to Israeli military occupation. Khamis' pieces depict sinewy but deformed bodies in bright and lively colours. These works convey to me a sense of Palestinian history in terms of how it has been 'written' into the body and the psyche. At the end of the chapter I discuss Makhoul's works which employ styles and vocabularies of art that foil notions of identity. Makhoul's particular juxtapositions of style and content serve also to 'play' with languages of identity, aesthetics, and politics. A summary of the four artists' places of exile, training, works and exhibition venues is presented in Appendix C.

Bhabha suggests that works of art are also affirmations of "a profound desire for social solidarity: 'I am looking for the join... I want to join... I want to join'" (Bhabha 1994a:18). What is joined by way of the image varies with each work and the context in which it is displayed. Political, social, psychological, and existential aspects of identity and belonging seem to be highlighted in different ways by the works, with each of these aspects present in each of the works. Shammout's narrative of collective identity that is so literally imaged at the beginning of the trajectory manifests in various ways along the continuum. Shammout's depictions of collective loss and grief attest to a valuing of identity over aesthetics, testimony over form. Makhoul's abstract depictions raise

similar questions, but from the other direction. By way of abstract forms, Makhoul's works seem to ask: what does form say about where and who we are? Each of the works joins questions of identity to artistic vocabularies. And the viewer is enjoined to defamiliarize and refamiliarize herself with her own frames of reference. Table 3.1 below elaborates on the roles of art in performing identity and politics.

3.2 Beginning of the trajectory – grand narratives

The first four works below portray the central historical events that have shaped the Palestinian experience—dispossession, displacement and exile, the destruction of Palestinian society, and loss of homes and homeland. These works by Shammout depict the experiences that remain the defining events in the lives of the second and third generation of Palestinians born since then, particularly Palestinian refugees. The works bring 'the' national story to the fore. The narratives of dispossession and loss that they articulate remain largely obfuscated from the framework in which the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is represented in the West. The narrative is also partially, as I suggest below, rescripted as 'ethnic culture' through discourses of multicultural art and culture in places of exhibition.

Table 3.1: Summary of artists, works, role of art in enactments of identity and ‘joinings’ of art, politics, and subjectivities

<i>Beginning of trajectory</i>		<i>Middle of trajectory</i>		
<i>Artists</i>	<i>Works</i>	<i>Efficacy / spaces / styles of art</i>	<i>Performing identity</i>	<i>‘joining’ art, politics and subjectivities</i>
Amin Sannmcut, b. 1934	The Departure (1963) Tragedy in the Camp (1963) Is it True the Sun Will Rise? (1960) To My Land (1974) Folklore Dress (1970)	Imagery creates and enacts national Palestinian narrative Venues: Multicultural exhibits; community displays Style: Figurative genre paintings	Identity is imaged through the prism of the nation and enacted by way of engaging audience ‘understandings’ of the content of the art	Art and politics meet in spaces of empathy and recognition of the humanity of Palestinians
Abdul Hadi Shala, b. 1948	Shala: Sabra and Shatilla (1982) Uprising 83 (1983) Challenge (1989) Intifada 2000 (2000) My Birthday (1991) I’m Waiting (1992) 8/96, (1996)	The imagery and style perform social struggle and psychic trauma/healing Venues: Artist-run exhibits; Arab community centres Styles: Cubist expressionism (Shala) and impressionistic (Khamis)	Identity is enacted by drawing audiences into a critical awareness of the content of the works, by way of the style and form of the art	Art and politics are ‘joined’ in spaces (canvas, exhibits) that widen narratives of Palestinian identity. The viewer is invited to identify with Palestinian experiences of exile and dislocation
Zahri Khamis, b. 1964	Khamis: Deir Yassin (1995) J’accuse (2003) Prison 1 (1995)			

End of trajectory				
<p>Bashir Makhoul, b. 1963</p>		<p>Zigzag (1992) Points of view (1998) one drop of my water (1999)</p>		
		<p>Imagery and form destabilize spaces of politics and identity</p> <p>Venues: Artist-run galleries</p> <p>Style: Hard edge abstract with Islamic design and calligraphy</p>		
		<p>Identity is enacted by defamiliarizing viewers' frames of reference, and playing with subject positions through juxtaposing (and re-placing) 'Islamic' and 'Western' forms</p>		
		<p>Politics is abstracted and aesthetic languages are reinvested with political comment. The works disengage the viewer from familiar binaries.</p>		

The Departure (Uprooting) (1963) portrays thousands of people fleeing Shammout's childhood town of Lydda (see Figure 3.1). Shammout painted himself into the painting as a 14 year old amongst his family and community that walked for 20 hours to safety with, unbeknownst to them at the time, no possibility of return.⁴⁹ I viewed this work as it hung on a wall in the artist's home. *The Departure* images what is embedded in the collective consciousness of Palestinians, passed on through generations in family stories or, sometimes, in silences. Interestingly, this image which depicts the Palestinian historical narrative most literally remained hanging on a wall in Shammout's home rather than in a retrospective of his work in an exhibit I attended (discussed below). He relayed that he remains too attached to the painting and does not wish to sell it. For Shammout, his paintings represent a diary. Some parts of his pictorial diary, such as *The Departure* and another of Mohamed Durra (discussed below), are not yet part of the public domain in the context of Canada. In the course of my research, Shammout was happy to show me the whole spectrum of his work. I believe he presumed I would render them in a way that would be understood within the historical context of Palestinian experience.

Another painting, *Tragedy in the Camp* (see Figure 3.2, images the experience of Palestinians at the end of their exodus—life in refugee camps. The detail of dress and ration bowls clutched in hands, foregrounds the situation in which the individuals are caught. The hills behind the barbed wire fence in the image show up as a sea of refugee tents in a subsequent painting.

⁴⁹ All unascribed quotes by Shammout are from my interviews with him on 22 December, 2000, and 12 March, 2002.



Figure 3.1: Amin Shammout, *The Departure (Uprooting)* (1963), oil on canvas, 1 x 1.8m (photograph by Tarek Abouamin)

While the term *genre* has undergone semantic changes in its use in art history and criticism, the following definition would seem to apply to Shammout's style:

A genre painting offers a scene of everyday life wherein human figures, being treated as types, are anonymously depicted. In defining genre it is necessary to include reference to the anonymity of the figures, which are portrayed as types rather than as unique personalities (Washburn quoted in Fabian 1996:194).

Genre paintings aim to “catch the seemingly contradictory idea of predictable creativity, a kind of creativity that a community can share” (Fabian 1996:195). Many of Shammout's works depicting Palestinian scenes could be called figurative genre paintings, which serve as reminders of past experiences and present predicaments (Fabian 1996:195).

Along with those of other Palestinian artists painting at the time, Shammout's images created a visual language that translated individuals' experiences into national symbolism. The works of his cousin, Ismail Shammout, are very well known amongst Palestinians (as discussed in Chapter Two). The imagery and style of both their works influenced a generation of Palestinian painters and inaugurated painting as a profession (an exhibit of Ismail's works in Gaza, in 1953, was the first exhibition of paintings in Palestine by a Palestinian artist). In the 1960s, Amin Shammout's work was also exhibited in Gaza. The early paintings by Shammout were created during a period that Palestinians refer to as the "lost years," between 1948 and 1964, before the Palestine Liberation Organization formed, and before Palestinians had emerged regionally or internationally as independent actors or a national people (Khalidi 1997:178). These images portray the trauma of individual Palestinians, and contributed to translating the experiences of individuals into a collective, national plight.

Sherwell notes that Ismail Shammout's paintings "mark a significant turning point in Palestinian art, for they reveal that artists began to perceive the landscape, in some cases landscapes of their experiences, as a distinct genre of representation" (Sherwell 2003:63). Palestinian artists did not create representations of the war of 1948, and focused instead on depicting the emotional experience of the loss of their land (Sherwell 2003:63). These four paintings by Amin Shammout are representative of what Sherwell calls '*nakba* landscapes,' that feature wandering in exile in an unfamiliar landscape.

Shammout's iconographic imagery creates a kind of collective self-stereotyping. In the words of Kruger, "...the stereotype exists where the body is absent..." (Kruger

1991:446). Shammout places himself in the picture, perhaps, to both formulate a collective sense of history as well as to locate his own dislocated subjectivity. As Nigel Rapport notes, "...as individuals seek to locate themselves in this migrating world, so an imaging of order and collectivity in terms of social stereotypes is a means of positing a wished-for definitional stability while simultaneously being able to come to terms with the continuity of possibly radical personal change" (Rapport 1995:271). The individuals in the first four paintings are, hence, icons of a collective plight while also locating the artist and viewer in a historical and collective narrative.

Interestingly, these images evoke biblical imagery. In part, this can be attributed to influences in Shammout's youth. Shammout is Muslim but, when growing up in Lydda, he was fascinated by a church that dates back to the Roman period. Biblical interpretations connect the church to Jesus' return. While a student of art in Cairo, he planned to do his graduation project on Jesus Christ, but was advised by his teacher to do something closer to his experience. He decided upon the *nakba* which, as the defining moment of his life, reverberated through his art for decades afterwards.

Shammout's images are part of the materiality that 'performs' a Palestinian political geography and collective identity through various sites. They were completed while he lived in Egypt and Kuwait. During the 1970s and 1980s, his works were exhibited frequently in Kuwait and throughout the Arab World. Forty years later, the colours, hues, and imagery articulate with different contexts again, and are refracted through discourses of Canadian multiculturalism. In Canada, they perform the tasks of celebrating multiculturalism and honouring cultural heritage.

I viewed them in Canada as they were displayed in a retrospective of 30 of his paintings, dating from the 1960s to 2000, exhibited at Pier 21.⁵⁰ Pier 21 includes a Multicultural Art Gallery and a permanent exhibit of photos and stories of immigrants arriving into Canada at the port. A great number of Canadians first entered Canada through Pier 21.⁵¹ The permanent exhibit, next to the Multicultural gallery, lent a discursive framework to the site of Shammout's show that emphasized themes of diversity and 'multiculturalism.'

I also viewed some of these works again when they were hung in a more makeshift, outdoor display of cultural artefacts and food. This display was part of a summer, daylong multicultural gathering of displays featuring several local ethnic communities' food, music, clothing, and art works in downtown Halifax. The place and theme of these exhibits served to create particular cultural screens. These screens include the notion that Canada is enriched by the cultural contexts from which its citizens originate. The theme of multiculturalism emphasizes cultural sharing, diversity, tolerance, and embracing cultural difference within the context of 'Canadian values.' Underlying it is a Eurocentric worldview (as I elaborate in Chapter Six) and a presumed divide between the 'political' and the 'cultural.'

⁵⁰ *Amin Shammout: A Retrospective*, November 30 – December 30, 2000 was produced by and exhibited at Multicultural Art Gallery at Pier 21, Halifax, Nova Scotia. The Multicultural Art Gallery is funded by the provincial government and administered by the Multicultural Association of Nova Scotia.

⁵¹ Including my father a half-century ago from Palestine via Beirut. I learned this fact from my brother on my way to the exhibit, having previously assumed that my father had arrived by plane.

Shammout's images engage with the battle over legitimacy that is linked, as illustrated in Chapter Two, to the battle over land. His images of the *nakba* symbolize narratives of loss that are contested, and the injustice of dispossession and exile that remain to be redressed. The images contest the mythology of 'a land without a people for a people without a land' that continues to be invoked half a century after the dispossession of most of the indigenous population of Palestine, and despite the historical record that exists.

James C. Scott's notion of public and hidden transcripts refers to the (outwardly or mostly hidden) discourses and practices between dominant and subordinate groups that are scripted according to social context. Scott's use of the terms "hidden" and "public transcripts" is in reference to discourses and practices that serve to extract labour, goods, and services from subject populations (Scott 1990:21). Nonetheless, the notion of concealed transcripts is relevant also to artistic expressions which are variously situated in a "zone of struggle between dominant and subordinate" (Scott 1990:14)—in this case, between Israeli/Western discourses and Palestinian narratives.

Part of the zone of struggle reflected and enacted by Shammout's works is the media coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that often obfuscates the ongoing Israeli military occupation in favour of reports of 'Palestinian violence' and 'Israeli retaliation.' The overriding framework of media representation (as well as the framework of international negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians) ignores the tremendous imbalance of power between Israel and Palestinians, as well as the ongoing Israeli military occupation. One CNN report noted that Palestinians *claim* the presence

of Israeli troops in the West Bank and Gaza *amounts to* an occupation of Palestinian territory.⁵²

This context in which Palestinian narratives are contested lends Shammout's works poignancy for both the artist and viewers. Shammout noted to me that, "the whole media is against us. There is no outlet to tell our story, so it is told through music, literature, painting, sculpture, poetry, but when it is translated into English it faces the media's counter narrative of Palestinian violence and aggression." Shammout's images contest dominant discourses through the avenue that art has available to it—shaping structures of feeling and thereby changing the terms with which viewers engage with images of 'the other.'

Another painting not included in the exhibit portrays a twelve-year old boy named Mohamed Durra who, with his father, cowered against a wall in Jerusalem, to shield himself from bullets. The painting is a rendering of a photographic image that was circulated globally in the media. Shortly after the photo was taken, the boy died from a bullet wound. The incident received widespread coverage and international attention. Both sides accused the other of causing Mohamed's death. The wall against which the boy and his father cowered was destroyed by the Israeli military before an investigation was carried out. Shammout's painting of Mohamed Durra and his father is an attempt to wrest the meaning of the image away from the media framework. But, Shammout felt that the painting was "too political" for the exhibit, and that it would only be seen through the media framework. Both images—*The Departure*, and that of Mohamed

⁵² Quoted in independent journalist Nigel Parry's web-based diary posted at <http://nigelparry.com/diary/>.

Durra and his father--represent central elements of the Palestinian experience (the *nakba* and the ongoing Israeli military occupation) that, in the context of the exhibit in Halifax, remained part of a hidden transcript of Palestinian identity.

The first four images of Shammout's in the trajectory depict direct memories that the artist lived. For subsequent generations of Palestinians, these images convey postmemories, known through stories recounted by their parents' or grandparents' generations. Shammout's paintings convey the need to mourn as well as the unfinished project of bringing narratives into shared public space. As mentioned in Chapter One, the power of art can be seen to lie in its potential to create ambiguity and "an incalculably important social bond... of shared unease" (Nonas 1994:165). In Shammout's work, the emotive effect of the scenes of human suffering, as well as the underlying narrative of injustice, attempt to create a shared unease of knowing, rather than not knowing.

Shammout's painting, *Is it true the sun will rise?* was also included in the retrospective of his works (see Figure 3.3). I had a chance to look at the image more closely at his home, when it was temporarily turned into a film shoot by three Arab Canadian filmmakers. I found the painting interesting because it suggested to me a number of questions regarding the use of imagery of Palestinian women in association with the lost land, the preservation of culture, and the national struggle. The painting comprises the image of a woman sitting outside and looking into the distance. She is wearing a dress with the recognisable Palestinian embroidery design, and holding a corner of her *hijab*, or headscarf. The look of longing in the eyes of the woman seemed to me to convey the

collective plight of Palestinian loss of land, livelihood, and social framework—and the resultant insecurity, reinforced by the title in the form of a question.

Figure 3.2: Amin Shammout, *Tragedy in the Camp* (1963), 50 x 53.5in, oil on canvas (photograph by Tarek Abouamin)

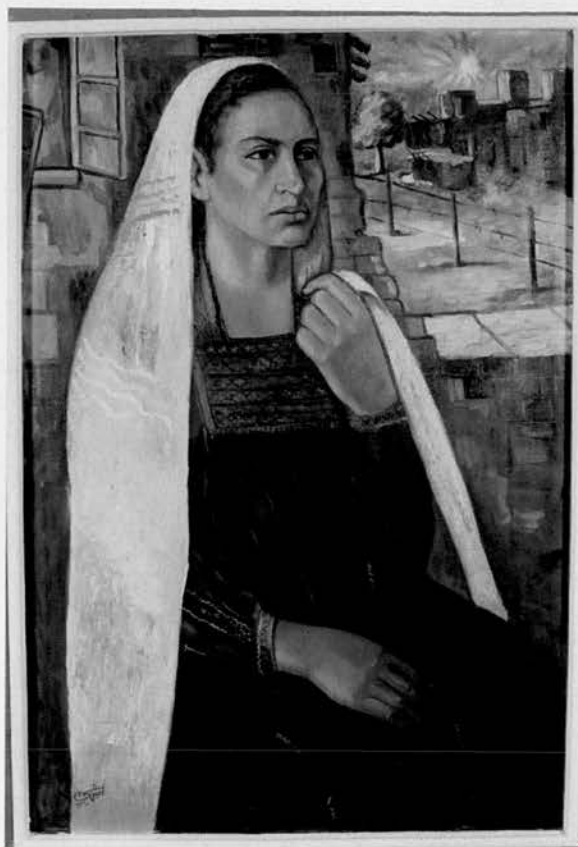


Figure 3.3: Amin Shammout, *Is it true the sun will rise?* (1960), oil on canvas, 45.5 x 32.5in (photograph by Tarek Abouamin)

I interviewed Shammout about the image as one of the filmmakers acted as interpreter.⁵³ The filmmakers wished to capture on film Shammout's description

⁵³ The following passages draw from this interview, conducted in Halifax, Nova Scotia, at Shammout's home, 12 March 2002.

of the painting that he previously narrated to them. Through a translator, Shammout explained that the scene is of a village called Beit Safafa. After 1948, when Israel was created, the houses of several families living in villages along the new border between Israel and the Jordanian controlled West Bank were suddenly scattered on either side of the divide. Half the village was under Israeli control and the other half under Jordanian rule, with a fence marking the border. The woman portrayed is waiting to see her daughter appear from behind the fence.

Shammout further explained that he had completed most of the painting in 1960 in Cairo. The woman in the image is a Palestinian woman living in Cairo who sat for Shammout when he was an art student. He added the background in 1966, following a visit to Beit Safafa. During this visit, he witnessed a wedding procession that moved along each side of the wire mesh fence, with relatives attempting to share their joy and embraces through the barrier. Shammout was struck by this separation of so many Palestinians caught by the new border, and returned to Cairo to paint the fence in the upper right corner of the canvas that he had painted years earlier.

The production of the image, thus, reflects the changes in conditions faced by Palestinians as well as multiple and continuing displacements. In previous discussions between Shammout and the filmmakers, Shammout had maintained a coherence to the story of the painting. The filmmakers had the impression that the painting was completed in its entirety after Shammout visited Beit Safafa and that the woman in the painting was a woman he saw while on his visit. When Shammout relayed the two-stage process of painting the image, the filmmakers felt they had a problematic narrative.

Their concern was that the film's prospective audiences would doubt Shammout's 'authenticity.'

With the veracity of the Palestinian narrative in question in the West, the filmmakers wished to portray Palestinian historical experience through a seamless fit between the image, the artistic process, and the historical record. Shammout's narrative to me reveals the transnational and embodied 'joins' between processes of art, dislocation, and expressions of identity. Shammout's second narrative situates himself within territorial and narrative discontinuities. Indeed, works of art represent spaces in which narratives can be powerfully evoked, contested, reformulated, or put into question. Shammout's images correspond with the perceived need to create space for a nationalist Palestinian narrative. Shammout's works create a narrative of dispossession, exile, occupation and *sumud* (remaining steadfast on the land). They reflect and recreate a drive to return to the land, and a cultural and existential closeness to the land.

Shammout painted the fourth image below in 1974. *To My Land* portrays a Palestinian *fellah* (farmer) carrying a pickaxe and basket, gazing out to his land (see Figure 3.4). The town and neat parcels of land in the background denote the rich cultivation and intimate connection of Palestinian society to the land. In my own encounter with the image, I 'see' a rupture between the peasant farmer and his land, a loss of the link between him and his environment. The clothes, the farmer's muscled forearm and build, convey a seeming natural intimacy with land. There is a halo-like ring in the sky behind the figure's head that seems to reinforce the image of the lone farmer as an icon of the

collective plight. I find the image compelling, in part because it seems to convey a completeness and surety in the brush strokes as well as in the implied narrative.



Figure 3.4: Amin Shammout, *To My Land* (1974), oil on canvas, 32 x 23.5in (photograph by Tarek Abouamin)

In 1976, two years after Shammout painted *To My Land*, Israeli forces shot dead six Palestinians from the village of Sakhnenn.

The six men had returned to their destroyed village to farm their lands. Israel proceeded to destroy all the Palestinian villages in that area of the Galilee. A widespread strike ensued. Each year since, Palestinians around the world mark the day the farmers were killed as Land Day. *To My Land* was printed as a poster and distributed worldwide by PLO cultural offices as the symbol of Land Day. Sherwell notes that these popular images created comforting symbols of a stable past which contrasted with the experience and uncertainty of Israeli occupation (Sherwell 2000).

Images such as Shammout's *To My Land*, came to symbolize both the connection (and loss of connection) to the land and the future re-uniting with the land through the

associated discourses of national liberation. I confer with Sherwell's suggestion that alienation and separation from the landscape "was compensated for through the articulation of memories. With the distance from the landscape, memories served as a way of holding onto place" (Sherwell 2003:67). The following image, *Folklore Dress from Ibdis* (see Figure 3.5), was painted in 1970 and highlights the artist's desire to create memories of the past as a means of holding onto what was lost. This image is part of a series that reflects a shift in materials and imagery. Moving from oil on canvas to gouache on paper, Shammout painted 36 images of women in 'folklore dress.' The images attempt to document pre-*nakba* cultural forms, including the diversity of the social and cultural context in which the artist grew up. Each painting depicts a style of women's dress associated with a particular city or region of Palestine.

The works in this series contrast with the sombre realism depicted in his work produced in the 1960s that portray Palestinian men and women *in situ*, with expressive features, evocative eyes and postures. The dresses and surrounding scene is rendered in a purposeful style, and the women wearing them are depicted as near mannequins. Each painting in the series depicts a woman in a colourful dress, and is identified by the name of a village or region written in Arabic script in the bottom right corner. The dress designs and colours correspond to various geographic regions of pre-1948 Palestine.

The series of 36 dresses is based on Shammout's research into the movement of people and the cross fertilization of cultural influences and styles of dress in Palestine in previous centuries. The portrayal of Turkish and Greek styles reflect Shammout's desire

to preserve the diversity and the richness of cultural influences in Palestine. The images reflect, in fact, a drastic conflation of a cultural life in which every Palestinian village



Figure 3.5: Amin Shammout, *Folklore Dress from Ibdis* (1970), gouache on paper, (photograph by Tarek Abouamin)

(some 700 before the *nakba*) had its own individual manner of dress (along with its own variations of prolific folklore, moral tales, and songs for every occasion). From her research on historical dress in Palestine, Jordan and Syria, Jehan Rajab notes that separate dresses and pieces of jewellery were made for different parts of the wedding ceremonies (Rajab 1989:19). The terminology for the different articles of clothing, fabrics, and stitches used in women's dresses also differed in each village and changed with each decade (Bushnaq 1991:122). Further, village women's costume was a diverse and changing phenomenon, with several styles co-existing at once. Some features were regionally specific, some common across Palestine. Some features of women's dress remained constant for generations, while others changed continually (Weir 1989:17).

In the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, many Palestinian artists in Palestine produced representations of the Palestinian landscape as idealised images with little historic specificity. Sherwell notes that in these images,

No reference is made to transformations that had taken place in the landscape. If these were landscapes of the past then they were stripped of any suggestion of disharmony or change, such as the events that led up to the war of 1948, and the subsequent increasing landlessness that the peasantry experienced... These images offered a fantasy of a stable past and an egalitarian communal life evident in the images of olive picking..." (Sherwell 2003:71).

Sherwell raises an important question. She asks: "When does a landscape become a national landscape, and what constitute the elements of a national landscape?" (Sherwell 2003:72). This occurs, she suggests, when a landscape is seen as depicting the memories of the collective (Sherwell 2003:72). By the time Shammout was painting images of his women in traditional dress from the Palestinian diaspora in Kuwait, representations of the village landscape with women and children and, perhaps, wheat sheaths (as described in Chapter Two), had come to symbolize the Palestinian national narrative of loss.

Images of women within these landscapes served to create a collective sense of responsibility to protect what was threatened and recover the loss. Images of Palestinian peasant women, in traditional embroidered dress, harvesting or caring for children "became the symbol of the motherland and all its nurturing qualities" (Sherwell 2000). These depictions portray women as bearers of culture, tradition, and historical memory, and influenced Palestinian painters in the diaspora.

The emptiness of the female figures in Shammout's series evokes, for me, an uninhabited cultural space. One possible reason for this starkness is Shammout's

remove from the places of Palestinian village culture. Nonetheless, while walking through the exhibit and viewing several of these paintings, I could understand their function as cultural re-membering and I was tempted to purchase the “folklore dress in Nazareth.” As the materiality of the culture is eclipsed, images become potent sources of enacting one’s belonging and place, in the displacement of exile. Images such as these dresses can function as a link between a rich and severed historical past, and the increasing globalization that finds Palestinians at increasing removes from the geography of their cultural origin. Shammout relayed to me that Palestinians living in Kuwait could not return to Palestine to buy these dresses. Workshops in the West Bank could not export their goods, and young Palestinian women in Kuwait were no longer learning the craft and patterns of the traditional embroidery to make their own dresses. So, a project was devised in which a design was made of the Ramallah style dress and shipped to Taiwan. Materials from Taiwan were used to sew 500 of the dresses that were then shipped back to Kuwait. One effect of this globalization is the further homogenization of Palestinian cultural forms.

Notably, in Palestine, the social context in which embroidery was created and which gave it its meaning no longer exists as it was largely destroyed with the war of 1948. Yet peasant women continue to embroider and see themselves as contributing to the national cause by preserving traditions. The relationship that determines the production of embroidery, though, as Sherwell notes, is largely an economic one. Moreover, the women who make these embroidered objects remain anonymous, while providing the material of other women’s national affiliation (Sherwell 2003:163). Shammout’s images

of the women in their dresses seem to reproduce this anonymity and create a collective self-stereotyping, as mentioned above, where the body is absent (Kruger 1991:446).

Shammout's paintings play a role in recreating and reproducing cultural memory and subjectivity for some Palestinians in Canada. This was evidenced in the very emotional response to my photos of Shammout's works of a Palestinian friend of mine who grew up in Kuwait. While the friend was familiar with the paintings of Shammout's better known cousin, Ismail, the style and subject matter of Amin Shammout's work evoked a nostalgia for his childhood in Kuwait and longings for his 'homeland.' One visitor to his exhibition at Pier 21, recorded a comment in the exhibition guestbook that echoed of a few other visitors. He states that Shammout's images represent "the lung through which our people inhale their heritage, history and wellbeing. It is an art which speaks for itself and tells the story of the sufferings of the Palestinians" (recorded in the guestbook of Shammout's Halifax exhibit). Shammout's perception is that an understanding of his work crosses communities. At the site of his exhibit, he noted that many people asked him to do more, some older people cried and that amongst all the visitors, the older people had "all understood" his work regardless of their national or cultural backgrounds.

Shammout's literal depictions of the loss of Palestine serve to recreate memories amongst Palestinian viewers. Shammout also attempts to create conscientious audiences amongst the general public. Aesthetics and identities are joined and perhaps contained. For example, Shammout's narrative of Palestinian identity is overt in the subject matter and style of his works. On the other hand, in Canada, Shammout's works are exhibited

primarily, if not exclusively, in venues that feature ‘multicultural’ art. These venues are created through discourses that underline art’s disengagement from politics: cultural origin and heritage are emphasized and contestations of historical and political narratives are de-emphasized. His art does the work of, according to one Palestinian visitor, “telling our story,” but its efficacy as a means of engendering ways “of looking and becoming” (hooks 1990:104) remains at least partly contingent on multicultural discourses of exhibitions situated at the interstices of international and historical power relations.

Below, I examine works that image the social life and history of Palestinians; works that image the psychic space that has resulted from the persistence of the Palestinian conflict; and those that bring into the same plane the wide strokes of Western imperialism and Islamic aesthetics.

3.3 Middle of the trajectory – painting social narratives, and imaging psychic survival

“If we paint a landscape, you will find our Palestine in this landscape.
If we paint somebody dancing, you will find our problem in this dancing.”
— Abdul Hadi Shala⁵⁴

“When historical visibility has faded, when the present tense of testimony loses its power to arrest, then the displacements of memory and the indirections of art offer us the image of our psychic survival”
— Homi Bhabha (1994a:18).

The ways in which Palestine is painted into the content, styles, and symbolism in the paintings differ amongst the artists featured in this chapter. For the following two artists, there is no imperative to create a historical record of Palestinian culture. There is, though, an attempt to find artistic styles and languages to depict aspects of the Palestinian national experience. The works that I place in the middle of the trajectory are by Abdul Hadi Shala and Zahi Khamis. The quotes above allude to the subject matter portrayed by these artists. Shala’s motivation as an artist is to paint “for the people.”⁵⁵ The subject matter of his works is quite varied. Many are explicit portrayals of Palestinian resistance, while recent ones feature “Canadian” skaters in motion, depicted in bold streaks of colour. It is difficult for me to find “our problem” in Shala’s skaters, but his words in the quote above denote his longstanding motivation to paint “our Palestine” in various forms and styles through his career. Shala’s words also belie a wider tendency toward interpreting all imagery in relation to the Palestinian national struggle and narrative (I explore this in more detail below).

⁵⁴ Personal interview, Mississauga, Ontario, 8 September 1999.

⁵⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes by Abdul Hadi Shala in this chapter are from my interview with him in Mississauga, Ontario, 8 September 1999.

Shala was born in 1948, about six months after his family fled from their village. As Shala embarked on his training in Cairo, the Six Day War resulted in Israel's military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Like Shammout, Shala lived in Kuwait for two decades before being expelled along with about 350,000 other Palestinians during the Gulf War. Shala's art has been exhibited Egypt, Kuwait, Canada, Spain, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Tokyo, Malaysia, Cyprus, Algeria, Morocco, Iraq, Bahrain, and Qatar.⁵⁶ He has also participated in a recent group exhibit in London, Ontario, called *Artists Against the Occupation*. This exhibit, Shala's website, and his canvases themselves are examined below as sites of enactments and re-memberings of Palestinian identity. Shala's website, which includes a virtual guestbook with comments from 'visitors,' provides some insight into the efficacy of his art for different viewers.

The first four of his works reproduced below chronicle the social forms of Palestinian resistance against the occupation. *Intifada 2000* (see Figure 3.9) was featured in the London showing of *Artists Against the Occupation*. The latter three works (Figures 3.10 to 3.12) provide texture and a sense of the 'interiority' of Palestinian subjectivity. Shala's images were painted several years after Shammout's images of the *nakba*, and reflect wider artistic influences. Shala's works convey the social costs of the *nakba* and Israeli occupation.

The first work represented below is entitled *Sabra and Shatilla* (1982) (see Figure 3.6) and derives its title from the names of two Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. The image is a depiction of the massacre of Palestinians in these camps following the

⁵⁶ Shala is a member of London, Ontario's artist-run centre, the Forest City Gallery and London Arts Council.

departure of Palestinian militia to Tunisia. The 1982 attack on the camps, by Israeli-backed Lebanese Falangist militia, resulted in the death of several hundred Palestinian civilians, overwhelmingly women, children and the elderly. The massacre was a shock that continues to resonate amongst Palestinians. The influence of Picasso's cubist style is apparent in this painting—especially Picasso's *Guernica*.⁵⁷



Figure 3.6: Abdul Hadi Shala, *Sabra and Shatilla* (1982), oil on canvas, 110 x 220cm (photo by M. Marshy of a photograph by the artist)

The following three of his works portray a progression of social forms of resistance to the Israeli occupation.⁵⁸ *Uprising 83* (see Figure 3.7) is one of a group of paintings Shala completed between 1983 and 1987, before the Palestinian *intifada*, or uprising had galvanized Palestinian society.

⁵⁷ Picasso's *Guernica* is a memorialization of the 20th century's first aerial bombing of a civilian population—in Guernica, a Basques cultural centre, by Germany in 1937. The painting quickly became a powerful anti-war symbol. The movements of the painting itself mimicked those of Picasso in that they remained 'exiled,' Picasso until his death, from Spain. Picasso had refused to return to Spain before Franco's death, and refused to have *Guernica* repatriated to Spain until liberties had been restored to the people of Spain. *Guernica* continues to serve as a reminder of the horrors of war. A copy (presumably) of the painting was hanging in the United Nations Security Council chamber when Colin Powell gave a press conference in February of 2003, urging war on Iraq and, interestingly, was covered up for the occasion ("Artistes" nd).

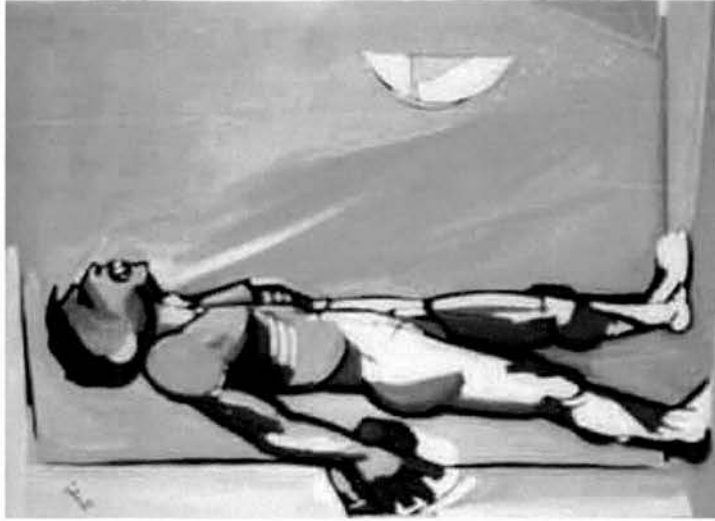


Figure 3.7: Abdul Hadi Shala, *Uprising 83* (1983), oil on canvas, 73 x 100cm (image provided by the artist)



Figure 3.8: Abdul Hadi Shala, *Challenge* (1989), water colour, 12 x 16in (image provided by the artist)

⁵⁸ The full range of Shala's paintings are displayed on his website: <http://shala.itmerge.com/>



Figure 3.9: Abdul Hadi Shala, *Intifada 2000*, acrylics on toiled canvas, 57 x 46in (image provided by the artist)

In *Uprising 83* and other of his works painted in the early years of the 1980s, the canvas is dominated by lone individuals resisting Israeli military occupation. Shala paints the body as the locale of struggle in these works at a time when resistance had not yet engulfed Palestinian society (as it eventually did during the first intifada, that began in 1987). The image today serves to re-member the ongoing resistance that Palestinians waged against Israeli occupation before the more widely narrated national intifadas. Once the first intifada galvanized all sectors of Palestinian society in 1987, Shala's paintings began to depict the social contours of struggle, with all members of society portrayed as taking on various roles in the national struggle. In these images, such as *Challenge* (1989) (see Figure 3.8), symbols (including the flag, or the colours of the flag) portray a unified national struggle. The bandaged horse symbolizes for him the Palestinian people as maimed. Images similar to *Challenge* were widely distributed as

posters, and depicted stone-throwing youths, nationalist symbols and romantic images of women and the land.

Intifada 2000 is a depiction of the second intifada and reflects the increased militancy of the struggle (see Figure 3.9). Shala described the scene as a funeral procession for a martyr. A body is draped in a Palestinian flag and the event has a clear political charge. Each figure wears a black and white scarf, or *kafiya*, a symbol of the Palestinian cause. When comparing the three images of struggle, it is possible to read the changing social context and narratives of struggle that have accompanied Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation in the last two decades.

In another group of paintings, Shala uses Indian Ink to depict startling images of figures and scenes (see Figures 3.10 and 3.11). *My Birthday* (1991) was painted while Shala was living in Kuwait during the Gulf War. The date of his birth is written on the image and he recounted to me that he wants “to say that I was born in Palestine in 1948, when my people left their country as a result of the *nakba*.” At the bottom of the painting is a woman who has died and a crying baby. The windows and door are broken, signifying that “everything is destroyed.” The painting seems to invoke an ever-presentness of suffering, and a conflation of individual bodies with the national tragedy. The next image *I’m Waiting* (1992) (see Figure 3.11) conveys to me a suspension of life and intimacy being waited out from various corners of the world. The image, in fact, seems to illustrate a passage by Palestinian poet and writer, Mahmoud Darwish. Darwish describes Palestinians living in exile as living emotionally alienated and decentred, “between two negations.” He states,

You are not going there, and you don't belong here. Between these two negations this generation was born defending the spirit's bodily vessel, onto which they fastened the fragrance of the country they've never known. They've read what they've read, and they've seen what they've seen, and they don't believe defeat is inevitable. So they set on the trail of that fragrance (emphasis in original, Darwish 1995:17).



Figure 3.10: Abdul Hadi Shala, *My Birthday* (1991), india ink, 19 x 25.5cm (image provided by the artist)



Figure 3.11: Abdul Hadi Shala, *I'm Waiting* (1992), india ink, 17.5 x 24.5cm (image provided by the artist)

In still another set of the paintings begun in 1987, Shala uses patterns derived from embroidered women's dresses, mosque walls, Arabic script, and cities and villages. These paintings are Shala's attempt to reshape Palestinianness, in an abstract style (see Figure 3.12: 8/96, 1996). Shala's inspiration for these paintings were various pieces of music which he attempted to incorporate into his treatment of the imagery. Certainly, 8/96 (1996) evokes a sense of movement. The mix of images is unified in his mind by the continuity of music.



Figure 3.12: Abdul Hadi Shala, 8/96 (1996), oil on canvas (image provided by the artist)

Like Shammout's images of the Canadian landscape in Nova Scotia, Shala began painting images that seem to represent his desire to connect with his new Canadian context. These paintings depict ice skaters in broad strokes that convey a great deal of energy and motion. They have no trace of the very prominent Palestinian and Arab themes of his other works, and they are very well and widely liked (judging by comments in Shala's website guestbook).

Sites of art and resistance:

Shala's piece, *Intifada 2000*, was shown with several other artists' works in one of a series of exhibitions entitled, *Artists Against the Occupation*. These exhibits provide an indication of how Shala's works articulate with the contexts of different locales and transnational activism. *Intifada 2000* was featured in the London, Ontario, exhibit of *Artists Against the Occupation*. Tokyo-based artist and human rights activist, Mizuko Yakuwa, conceived the series of exhibits shortly after the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States. Yakuwa put out a call to artists around the world asking them to initiate exhibitions about the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands. Exhibits have thus far been held in Tokyo, London (Ontario), Philadelphia, and Montreal.

In the Montreal show, people thronged to the opening night for which a young artist created a wrecked and smoking minivan outside the entrance to the exhibit. A mock checkpoint was set up that had some of the hallmarks of Israeli military checkpoints in Palestine. Traffic was interrupted on the street outside the gallery and members of the general public were accosted and asked a series of questions about where they were going and what their business was. The 'soldiers' had a brisk manner and were serious and unsmiling. But they were clad in white overalls and maintained a civility that made their performance more symbolic than reflective of the actual humiliations meted out by soldiers at Israeli checkpoints. Visitors to the gallery reported to me that the effect was, nonetheless, tremendous. An artist involved in the exhibit noted that the city of Montreal enabled such an action as anywhere else it would have been more difficult to

disrupt traffic and pedestrians.⁵⁹ London, Ontario is a smaller and less urbanized city. When the exhibit took place there, it was a more “homey” affair, according to Sami Zubi, a participating artist. Arabic food and refreshments were provided to visitors, for example.⁶⁰

Further study of the differences in the ways in which different locales engage audiences in different ways would be fruitful. In any case, a crucial point here is that the series of exhibits place Shala’s and other artists’ works unambiguously within the context of political comment and activism. The flyer for the Montreal showing notes that “the artist-participants believe, as do many concerned peace activists, Human Rights organizations and Humanitarian groups, that a just peace will only come to the Middle East when, as a first step, the occupation is ended” (“Artistes” nd). The guestbook for the Montreal showing of *Artists Against the Occupation* is a veritable terrain of political and artistic battle, with signatories responding directly to other signatories with arrows joining commentary in English, French, Arabic, and Hebrew.

One visitor wrote in the guestbook that, “The minute I walked in, I felt I belonged, I felt at home. *Shukran* [thank you].” Another viewer noted that “It is important for people to realize that beyond the words, behind the rhetoric are people (not ghosts) whose faces must be shown and whose stories must come to light. You have successfully managed

⁵⁹ *Artists Against the Occupation* in Montreal was held at MAI (Montréal, arts interculturels), and curated by Freda Guttman and Rawi Hage, artists who also had works in the show. The show included works by thirty-one artists from Canada, Germany, Tokyo, Palestine, and the United States. MAI was established in 1998. As “a space for dialogue and interchange between cultures stimulating collaboration between different partners, MAI has the mandate of supporting creation, presentation and outreach of intercultural arts for a diversified audience” (http://www.m-a-i.qc.ca/site_english/main.html).

⁶⁰ Personal interview, Ottawa, 10 March 1999.

to do this.” The viewer signed off as “visiting from Occupied Palestine.” Another visitor said, “Thank you for making us think; for making us emotional; and for forcing me to ponder how to spend this inspiration.” The exhibits enact alternate discourses of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Discourses of human rights and Israeli occupation are foregrounded in exhibition literature. Artists participating in the exhibit were from Canada, the United States, Germany, Tokyo, and included Canadians of Arab as well as Jewish extraction. The participation of artists from a wide spectrum of national identities and origins, in an exhibit that linked their works along a common theme served to render the artists’ (and viewers’) identities strategic in the first instance and Palestinian, Canadian, Jewish or Japanese in the second.

Viewers also engage with Shala’s work through his website. Many visitors to the site express gratitude for “the Palestinian story” that he tells. One American visitor noted that “This is a wonderful site and I want to use it on my site to reach American evangelical Christians for the truth of what is happening in Palestine. God bless you for putting out the truth.” These comments reveal the meaning of Shala’s images as historical witness. Other responses point to the website itself as a link between dispersed members of Shala’s family. For example, one entry reads:

Hello Mr. Shala! I've enjoyed your website tremendously. The way I found it is actually through your nephew, Osama. I am his art teacher in Doha, Qatar and he has asked me for the past week every day if I have looked at his uncle's website yet. He is quite proud of you and your work, even though I understand that the two of you have never actually met. Keep painting!

Shala’s works and their exhibition sites enable a tracing of the social costs of occupation for some Palestinians, and dispersion and exile for others. They also represent remembering of locales and political projects. The discussion below focuses on works by

Zahi Khamis which. To my mind, Khamis uses artistic expression to powerfully render the psychic costs borne by Palestinians and the need to configure these into political frameworks of negotiation between Palestinians and Israelis.

‘Psychic survival’: art as a writing of history on the body

Zahi Khamis’ works mine the terrain of the body as the site of memory. His art does the work of re-membering both atrocities as well as mythological histories. Bright colours and deformed figures, in various impossible poses and dances dominate his paintings. They join distinctly political commentary with enticing colour and disorienting imagery. Bodies that are not bodies but distended limbs that curve with horror, are rendered in bright popsicle colours. As a spectator, I am both stunned and enticed by his images. Khamis says of his works, “If you look again at my images you may find the body ravished yet it fights back.”⁶¹

In terms of how they ‘fit’ within the trajectory, Khamis’ paintings serve to widen the frame of reference to include the life of the imagination—mythology and literature underpinning the Palestinian imagination, and the unresolved psychic trauma that continues to haunt Palestinians. These aspects of Palestinian identity are ‘performed’ through his images. As will be more clear below, Khamis’ artistic rendering of these submerged, unspeakable aspects of Palestinian identification and subjectivity are joined to his challenge of the terms in which political narratives and negotiations are carried out.

Khamis' work speaks directly to the role of art in our psychic survival, as well as the search to 'join' art to greater understanding. Born in Reineh Village, outside of Nazareth, Khamis has been living in the United States since 1982, and teaches algebra at a high school in Baltimore, Maryland. He has exhibited in Washington, at the Palestine Centre, and will have a show in Pennsylvania in 2004. There are no reviews of Khamis' works though his website posts an interview conducted with him in 1998. My own discovery of Khamis' art occurred in the course of scanning internet sites of Palestinian culture and art.

Khamis started painting in the mid-1990s, with no formal art training. He had been writing poetry previously but found it was no longer sufficient to express himself. Art, he notes, "is a way of coping with the difficulty of talking about the history of Palestine in the United States. Palestinian history is heard as a nuisance here, but it's a living history." He was prompted to paint, though, after moving his family back to the village where he grew up in Israel. Khamis' art is also about creating a definition for himself that challenges Israeli constructs of Palestinians and rewrites Palestinian subjectivity. After enduring a worsening situation for Palestinians in Israel, he returned again to the United States and continued to paint with acrylics and watercolour on canvas and paper. In an interview with an art critic that is posted on his website, he notes,

I think of it as a way of defining myself as a Palestinian, of defining myself instead of accepting the Israeli definition of me. The very worst thing that the Israelis have done to Palestinians is turn them into political objects. What they have done to us has made us focus on our pain, on our oppression. When Palestinians get together, they exchange tales about someone being shot or being removed from their home. It is always on our minds. That is something I want to change. I want to use my art to create new territory, to create new space where

⁶¹ Unless otherwise indicated, quotes by Zahi Khamis in this chapter are from my telephone interview with him on 28 November, 2003, as well as subsequent telephone conversations and email correspondence.

we are not always protecting what we have, where we can laugh and play and be lovers. My art rehumanizes people who have been too politicized (Thym 1998 np).

Khamis draws inspiration from the work of Picasso and Diego Rivera, whose works he studied while living in San Diego. Themes that arise in his imagery include the tragedy of the Palestinian experience, ways it is contained in memories, and how it remains beyond the reach of straightforward narratives. This is partly because, he notes, “memory is an open wound for Palestinians.”

I’ve thought about putting it down in writing, but I don’t know where to start. I don’t know how. I don’t like straightforward narratives. Poetry is the best companion to memory, because memory remains open. Memory is an open wound for Palestinians.

His piece, *Deir Yassin* (1995) (see Figure 3.13), is a stark commentary on both the extremely brutal massacre of most of the 245 inhabitants of Deir Yassin in 1948, as well



Figure 3.13: Zahi Khamis, *Deir Yassin* (1995), acrylic on paper, 20 x 29in (image provided by the artist)

as the state of shock that is not resolved for Palestinians. As noted in Chapter Two, the massacre precipitated the flight of Palestinians in 1948, and continues to haunt Palestinians and the Middle East in general (Hogan 2001). Khamis’ mother’s stories of the period “have become part of my own memory,” he notes. This postmemory, as

noted in Chapter One, reflects “a different desire, at once more powerful and more conflicted: the need not just to feel and to know [their parents’ world before it was destroyed], but also to re-member, to re-build, to re-incarnate, to replace and to repair...” (Hirsch 1998:420). Born after the *nakba*, Khamis re-members his past and future through the previous generation’s traumatic rupture. Both narrative and artistic renditions of memory are difficult to create. And this difficulty is rendered through silences implied in the images. Khamis notes, “there is always silence to the images, an ambience that is silence. They are totally tragic and totally hopeful too.”

J'accuse (2003) (see Figure 3.14) is a reference to the famous Dreyfus Affair in France in the 1890s. A Jewish captain in the French Army was accused of spying for the Germans. At his trial, anti-Semitic forces of the entire French society were mobilized.



Figure 3.14: Zahi Khamis, *J'accuse* (2003), acrylic on paper, 22 x 29in (image provided by the artist)

The event became a huge scandal when French novelist Emile Zola wrote his well-known defence of Dreyfus in a paper entitled "J'accuse" (I accuse). Khamis re-appropriates this phrase in reference to what is happening to Palestinians.

The wider context in which Palestinian narratives, history, and experiences are denied and disconnected from the history of Zionism and the creation of the state of Israel also affects the creation of art for Khamis. In the United States, he confronts, he says,

a cold shoulder to Palestinian issues and blind support to Israel. There is a lack of interest and a lot of enmity about the Palestinian situation. Everything is mingled into Israel. The Israeli lobby makes it impossible to speak out. The New Patriot Act is destroying the country itself. Freedom of speech and civil liberties are being sacrificed in the name of security.⁶²

In this context, Khamis' use of vibrant colours cleverly draws audiences into his images. He notes that:

Viewers are seduced by the colours and then find the story within. The art is very successful in this way. In general, people relate to the sadness and they want to know more. It moves the viewer to a new territory of looking at our memories and story. The works are a parallel path into the Palestinian story and through them the story is confronted with less resistance [from viewers].

The vibrant colours, contrasted with the bodies that are deformed and tilted, also seem to give artistic expression to a sense of deep absurdity that is nurtured as a coping mechanism in Palestinian humour, writing and, more recently, films.⁶³ The vibrant, very happy colours draw the viewer in to the stories of the deformed figures precariously balanced on uncertain ground and within the silences that are part of Palestinian

⁶² Unlike the interviews with the other visual artists, the interview with Khamis was conducted after the attacks on the World Trade Towers and in Washington, on September 11, 2001.

⁶³ For example, Emile Habiby's novels and filmmaker Elia Suleiman's *Divine Intervention* use sarcasm, a deep sense of irony, and absurdity. Interestingly, while watching Suleiman's film,

subjectivity. Khamis' *Prison 1* (1995) (see Figure 3.15) is part of a series depicting members of a family of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons.



Figure 3.15: Zahi Khamis, *Prison 1* (1995), acrylic on paper, 20 x 29in (image provided by the artist)

What is striking about Khamis' work and narrative is a tension between, on one hand, their nearness to the issues and contemporary situation faced by Palestinians under Israeli military occupation and within Israel and, on the other hand, their distance from the narrow set of imagery that characterizes more overtly 'political' images (such as the Palestinian flag or the *kafiyya*). Neither is there imagery of serene village life and Palestinian embroidery in his work. Hence, his works seem to emerge out of an undercurrent of or perhaps cultural disconnect with Palestinian experience, and join the intimate with historical, transnational histories. Although his works image very central "Palestinian" themes, their style reflects the divide between Palestinians in Israel and

Chronicle of a Disappearance in the United States, Khamis recognized actual family members

those in the West Bank and Gaza (the isolation of Palestinians in Israel from the rest of the Arab world). Khamis has a desire to “bridge” this divide through his art. He stated to me,

Whenever I visited the West Bank, driving through the villages and big towns, I experienced the beauty I always wanted to have back in Reineh or Nazareth. The West Bank looked more Arab, less mutilated and more beautiful than where I grew up. The struggle for emancipation always played a role in recreating my own Palestinianhood. I am equally interested in showing my art in the “occupied territories” or inside the “green line,” for my art may work as a new bridge between these artificially disconnected areas.

An infusion of psychoanalytic discourse within humanities has contributed to notions that identity is inflected and nuanced primarily by personal, intimate histories, resulting in “a privatization of experience” (Hoffman 2000:17). Art that is overtly infused with political symbolism or national imagery is often interpreted as reflecting a naivety or qualified as ‘political art.’ What is lacking in such a framework is an understanding of ways in which national and international events inflect personal narratives as well as creative productions. For example, in her examination of personal narratives of Eastern Europeans, Hoffman notes that seemingly impersonal events acquire deeply personal meaning suffused with emotional overtones and memories. To intuit the overtones and to understand the “intimate resonances of the story, one needs to know the social code within which they function, the symbolic value that has accreted to each motif and dramatic component” (Hoffman 2000:13).

Another theme that underlies Khamis’ works is the return, *al awda*, of Palestinians to Palestine. Four of his paintings deal with this. Khamis pointed out to me that the issue is one that is salient to both international negotiations, as well as existential concerns.

sitting around a table in one scene.

Khamis' works, in their sliding and distended images, move the issue away from the scope of international negotiations and trade-offs and toward the interiority of Palestinian subjectivity.

Both kinds of time—intimate, private lives and national and transnational history—are represented in Shala and Khamis' works. For Shala, they are depicted in separate images. *Sabra and Shatilla* present historical tragedy, while *I'm Waiting* situates inner lives within view. Khamis' images meld together the tragedies of history with the trauma of inner lives. Khamis' dancing colours render the “open wound” of Palestinian memory in a way that re-members pockets of bodily and psychic narrative to geopolitical processes. The unspeakable is interpolated into political discourses, to create new possibilities for telling “our story.” Khamis' works “joins” (in Bhabha's sense) the body, the social (including political), and the psychic realms as sites of narrative, subjectivity, and strategic identity. As elaborated above, both Shala and Khamis' works and their exhibition widen narratives of Palestinian identity.

The following section examines an artist, Bashir Makhoul, whose works I situate at the ‘end’ of the trajectory. Makhoul's works juxtapose symbols of Palestinian identity (such as the colours of the Palestinian flag) with hard-edged abstract forms. What results is an insertion of political comment into an aesthetic form that has been defined by the absence of political content. This “join” of art and politics serves to dislocate frames of reference and subject positions.

3.4 End of the trajectory -- abstracting politics, rejoining aesthetic languages

It seems perfectly consistent with my ideas and experience that my paintings remain unresolved, that I can have two cultures doomed never to understand one another completely merged in the same space (Makhoul 1995:186).

Bashir Makhoul's vast, abstract paintings and photographs depicting repeating patterns of bright red blotches, sand piles, or bubbles, as well as his installation pieces, lie at the end of the trajectory. At this part of the continuum, literal narratives are foiled and identity is deflected, shifting between subject and object of art, between viewer and image.

Makhoul was born in 1963, in Nazareth, a Palestinian town in Israel, and immigrated as a young adult to Britain, where he has been living since 1989. Makhoul's work includes acrylic painting on canvas, large-scale photographs, photographic wallpaper installations, video and sound installations, and mixed media pieces. Since his first one-man show in 1993, he has subsequently exhibited very widely.⁶⁴ Unlike the other artists examined in this chapter, Makhoul alone studied art in the place, if not the culture, of his 'homeland.'

Prior to his art studies in Britain, Makhoul studied art in Israel, at Oranim. Despite Israel's location in the Middle East, the only art and artists discussed in his courses were contemporary Israeli or Western artists. Hence, he did not acquire an acquaintance with

⁶⁴ His work has been shown at the Haywood Gallery, London, the Herzilya Museum in Israel, the Jordan National Museum, the Liverpool and Florence Biennials, as well as by galleries in

Islamic art or any other art of the region (Makhoul 1995:167). Makhoul's outsider status was reinforced by the quota system of the school, to which only one or two "Arab" students were accepted each year. His fees were not subsidized, unlike most of his counterparts.⁶⁵ He also studied in Hebrew, a language that was not his native tongue (Makhoul 1995:166-67). Moreover, Makhoul had a sense of precariousness regarding his position in the course and painted neutral subjects such as landscape and figurative pieces that enabled him to develop technically. Once studying in Britain, the physical distance from Israel gave him confidence to explore his own cultural background and impressions of Israel (Makhoul 1995:167).

Three of his pieces are discussed below, one is a painting from his early body of work, another is an installation piece (photographic wallpaper), and the third is one of a series of large-format photographs. I viewed the third piece mentioned above, *one drop of my water* (1999) (see Figure 3.18) at an exhibit of his work, *hold*, at Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool.⁶⁶ I encountered the other two works discussed below, as well as his body of work, through exhibit catalogues and reviews (including Biggs 1993-94; Cubitt 1998; Cubitt 1993-94). I situate Makhoul's work at the far end of the trajectory, in part because his pieces draw the viewer in by way of abstraction. This lends his art a certain

Pakistan, Australia, and elsewhere. Makhoul is currently the Head of the Department of Art and Design at the University of Luton, UK.

⁶⁵ Israeli universities and academic funds often provide financial assistance on the basis of criteria that Palestinians in Israel cannot meet, such as the completion of military service. Military service is also a criteria to gain such intangibles as a permit to park one's cars on or close to campus. The effect is an apartheid-like system whereby Jewish Israelis have greater access than Palestinian Israelis to the benefits and rights of citizenship.

⁶⁶ The exhibit was held from 22 January to 26 February, 2000. I attended on 26 February, when Makhoul gave an introductory tour of his works, and spoke to the artist afterwards. Unattributed quotes of Makhoul in this chapter are from his walk-through talk and question-and-answer session at this exhibit or my discussion with him afterwards.

cultural currency. More significantly, perhaps, is that his work infuses abstract forms with questions of power and morality.

Up to 1996, Makhoul produced large abstract paintings that recall the hard-edged lines of American Abstract Expressionism. These works often incorporate Islamic geometric design and Arabic letters in large Kufic script. For several years during this period, he restricted his colours to green, black, red, and white—the colours of the Palestinian flag. The colours were an oblique reference to the Israeli army's prohibition against the use of the Palestinian flag until the signing of negotiated agreements between Israel and Palestinians in 1993. Until this time, Palestinians living under Israeli occupation resisted in everyday struggles by wearing clothing with the colours of the flag, or by hanging their laundry to dry on lines by placing red shirts next to a green pillow case, next to a black pair of trousers, for example. These small acts of defiance were often met with brutality on the part of the Israeli army.

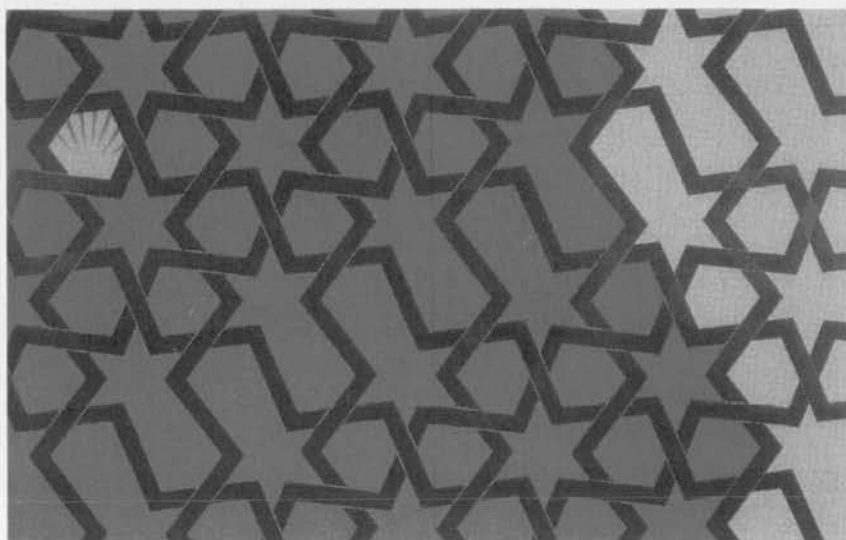


Figure 3.16: Bashir Makhoul, *Zigzag* (1992), acrylic on canvas, 350 x 230cm

Restricting his art to these four colours for years also saved Makhoul money. He bought in bulk. And the colours of the flag served his purpose of exploring how to have people identify him as Palestinian. In a walk-about talk during an exhibit, Makhoul noted that, “My identity has shifted from one place to another. I was content to call myself Palestinian without knowing what it is to others. Through art, I explore my position to have people make associations and make me who I am without it necessarily being who I am.” Moments later, a viewer pressed him about who he identifies with if not with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Makhoul responded that he cannot be represented, and that the source and terrain of enfranchisement is not clear.

Makhoul ‘belongs’ as an artist first and as a Palestinian second. He experiments through his art with projecting identities that he may or may not take on. Through his own narrative and in the ways in which his art is signified in gallery texts and in scholarly critiques, his Palestinian identity is invoked. Makhoul’s work itself plays with the assumed boundary between his art and his self. During Makhoul’s talk at this exhibit, the invited art critic suggested that as an exile Palestinian from Israel, in Britain, he has a certain aura, an exotic other identity that is “a good card to play.” At times, the card of his identity became fixed within art discourses that privilege the abstraction of meaning over the material processes through which meaning is signified, enacted, and embodied. For example, during Makhoul’s gallery tour and talk, I asked him how he felt his Palestinian origin manifests in the form and content of his works. In response to my question, the guest art critic interjected that one must not associate any identity to the artist as this is a way of avoiding how the work confronts one. The ambivalence regarding the appropriate ‘place’ of Makhoul’s identity in relation to his art derives only

in part, I believe, from the fact that his work strives to challenge the frames of reference around identifications and belonging. Ambivalence derives also from sensibilities around personal narrative and identity in relation to art discourses. In Canada, for example, an artist noted that curators and audiences in French-speaking Canada were much more interested in personal narrative and identity issues than those in English-speaking Canada. These differences shape the way in which art and artists are packaged for the viewing public.⁶⁷

Makhoul's works that combine Western abstraction and Islamic patterns in hard edge paintings are informed by his navigations of identity, and infused with broad aesthetic and political commentary. This commentary is perhaps most overt in his work, *Zigzag* (1992) (see Figure 3.16). In this piece, the Shell Company logo, a symbol of Western imperialism and neocolonialism is embedded within Islamic design. Its edges are shaved off by the lines of the surrounding design, giving a sense of its submergence within the framework of Islamic design—itself abstracted into an art form reminiscent of the large-scale and hard-edge works by Western and especially North American artists of the 1960s (Cubitt 1993-94:43).

The Shell logo brings to mind the geopolitics of the (first) Gulf war. It also links together Western imperial violence and Islamic culture more generally, according to cultural analyst, Sean Cubitt, providing a commentary on the erasure in the West of ancient traditions of art practice, and the challenge of their return (Cubitt 1993-94:47). Makhoul's use of Islamic design in a form that recalls Western abstraction serves to

⁶⁷ Telephone conversation, Ottawa, 1 March 2001.

infuse modernist abstraction with content and moral communication that has otherwise been discarded within this art form (Cubitt 1993-94:49; see also Cockroft 1992:89).

Islamic design also functions as an abstract style. But, as noted in Chapter One, unlike Western abstraction, Islamic geometric designs are associated with theological inspiration. Interestingly, Makhoul's use of Islamic design is not meant to evoke in the viewer and identification with God or the divine. Rather, for the artist, his work is meant to challenge the idea that Arabic calligraphy has to be situated in relation to its historic roots and functions. He says, "my use of calligraphy has deliberately broken the rules of Arabic script, to the extent that fluent readers of Arabic cannot always read what I have written in my paintings. Such is the distortion. Non-readers of Arabic will not recognize this irony and will often assume that the Arabic is straightforward" (Makhoul 1995:173).

What Makhoul seems to do with this and other paintings in this style is to displace what is 'Western' and what is 'Islamic.' In *Zigzag*, the Islamic patterns provide analytic authority and geopolitical commentary on Western imperialist violence (in the shape of the Shell logo) embedded in it. I confer with Cubitt's description that,

The ability of abstract work to carry content, consistently contested by Western formalist modernisms, is reasserted here. The specific conditions of the Palestinian case render possible too an unusually double articulation of the work with two audiences... (Cubitt 1993-94:49).

Cubitt differentiates the two audiences as:

a 'local' audience for whom the Kufic script is more than decorative, more than a motif, and for whom the colours of the palette are more than decipherable

encodings; and a 'global' audience posited by the rationalism of the Western abstract tradition.

What is interesting is that in Cubitt's reading of Makhoul's work, the two audiences are differentiated in a way that renders the audience of Western abstract design global in its perspective and those who understand the Kufic script (out of its cultural context, in England) as local. The West is maintained as the dominant vantage point. I would suggest, rather, that Makhoul's use of Kufic script in hard-edged abstract forms produces a kind of dual defamiliarization. Assumptions associated with Western abstraction are played off those associated with Islamic design. The Arabic writing is deliberately made illegible to fluent readers of Arabic. The work, then, extends beyond two audiences to destabilize any one ('local' or 'global') subject position and suggests new critiques and engagements.

A subsequent installation piece of Makhoul's further disrupts categories of 'here' and 'there.' *Points of view* (1998) consists of repeated patterns of a photographic image of a bullet hole in a sun-drenched wall (see Figure 3.17). The pattern is turned into wallpaper, giving the space the feel of a mundane and benign 1970s 'rec-room.' The evenness of the wallpaper gives one the sense that the bullet holes were carved out of a building in Beirut with a sharp paper knife and transplanted effortlessly out of their context. The effort, then, is transferred to the viewer who must become familiar with the repeated image in the interior of a home. Suddenly the safety that the barrier of walls is meant to provide dissipates. As Cubitt convincingly observes, "We cannot assemble a single past from these images: only a general theme, a general thesis, about the

persistence of war long after peace breaks out. About the internal as well as external scars it leaves...” (Cubitt 1998:35-37).

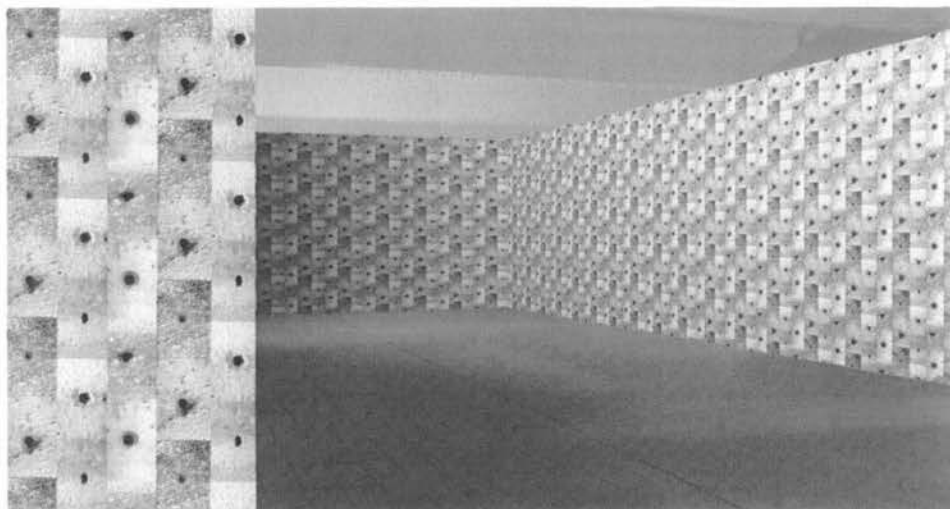


Figure 3.17: Bashir Makhoul, *Points of view* (1998), photographic printed wallpaper (image reproduced with permission from Mid Pennine Gallery, U.K.)

Questions of subjectivity and particularity are inserted and taken up in Makhoul’s art in different ways in each piece. Recognizable images are used in ways that both resonate in the viewer as well as create a kind of (and perhaps shared) vertigo that disassembles mechanisms of subjectivity. Foreground and background are played off each other.

In his subsequent work, Makhoul produced large-scale photographs of brightly coloured, repeating drops of water, splatters of blood, or “centimetres” of skin or soil. These images are seductive in the vibrancy of the colours, the tactile images, the symmetry, and their almost crystalline presentation. They invite. They make your (my) mouth water. And they do not create a sense of foreboding and dis-placement that *Points of view*, for example, might create.

one drop of my water (1999) (see Figure 3.18) belongs to this series, entitled *who's who*.

The series consists of eight images, two sets each of sand, water, blood, and skin.

Perhaps symbolising the four elements of earth, water, air, and fire, the digitally manipulated photographs give a sense of harmony and the primacy of pattern. The images are drawn from microscopic enlargements. Although at first glance, the large photographs seem to have no 'Palestinian' content, they are described by the galleries that show them as being directly linked to Makhoul's Palestinian identity.

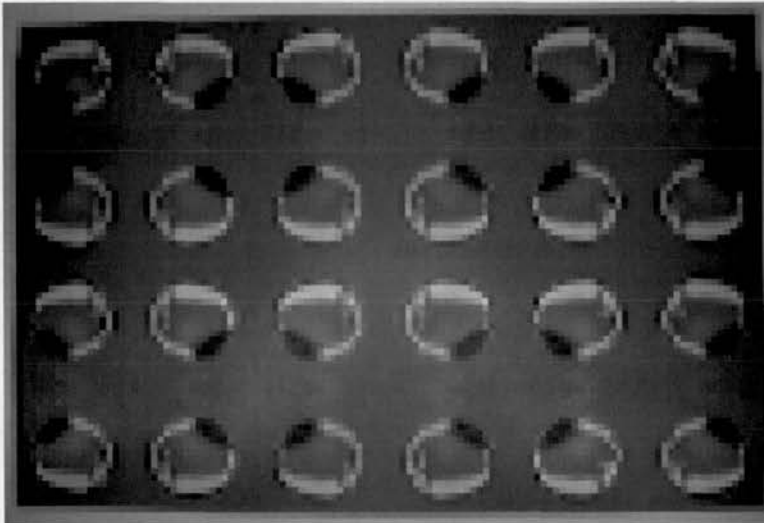


Figure 3.18: Bashir Makhoul, *one drop of my water* (1999), photograph on foamex, 200 x 300cm (photograph by M. Marshy)

When asked by a visitor to the exhibit, *hold*, why he repeats the images, Makhoul said it facilitates points of view on the relationship between 'I' and 'we' and between 'one' and the group. The individual unit is made larger than life but, at a certain point it becomes redundant, Makhoul suggested during his talk at his exhibit, and the pattern becomes paramount in that it relies on the unseen. Perhaps Makhoul creates a new

relationship between image making and the image. The image itself becomes something that is hiding far more than it is revealing. Spaces of narrative and spaces of silence come to mind. One is not comprehensible without the other.

At the end of the trajectory, the viewer is not entreated to identify with the 'other,' but encounters a play with difference and separateness. In Makhoul's *one drop of my water*, difference and separateness are moved to another scale, that of the elemental substance of life. The image and the substance of life are interchangeable; and the individual droplet of water (and the viewer) become lost in the collectivity. Through works such as these, new artistic languages emerge from the remove of exile. Complexities and imbalances of power in contests over water (Israel's diversion of water from its neighbours' aquifers, and the hoarding of water for its illegal settlements, and the denial of water to Palestinians) are effaced in favour of an image of life itself, where the individual unit is lost (and found) in the absent or eclipsed collective.

3.5 Conclusion – re-placing identity through art

It would seem that the more directly the works on the trajectory depict the dominant national Palestinian narrative, the more narrow are the material and symbolic reference points in the art. Certainly, the subject positions suggested by the art works are both elusive and constituted through the forces of historical time. The paintings in this chapter indicate, if anything, that the performative nature of identity is mirrored in the performative nature of aesthetic meaning. Both are contingent and partial. Both draw on preconceived categories and boundaries. Both correspond to and contest various

political projects. The art examined above is by artists living in exile not from a postcolonial nation but from a nation that is under siege. The efficacy of the works is shaped by contexts of exhibition. Those sites that engage with Palestinian narratives of dispossession and longing (such as the exhibit, *Artists Against the Occupation* and Sean Cubitt's critiques of Makhoul's work), the colours of the Palestinian flag (for example) take on strategic significance rather than nationalist or nostalgic meanings (Cubitt 1993-94; 1998).

In his own comprehensive study of Palestinian artists and their work, Makhoul suggests that artists of Palestinian origin emphasize either identity or aesthetics in their work (Makhoul 1995). What I suggest in this chapter is that both identity and aesthetics are performed in various ways through the form and content of the works, and within particular (and interconnected) contexts within which the works are signified.

The trajectory does not, as it may appear on the surface, imply a normative maturing of art from 'political art' to 'fine art.' It does, however, represent different ways in which different artistic styles, content, and contexts create different subject positions and narratives that are relevant to various political projects within and outside of the rubric of national struggle. The continuum is one that initially asserts Palestinian authenticity. The *nakba* took place. Hundreds of thousands of villagers and landowners who were Palestinian were forced to flee under duress and deadly aggression. These events found expression in artistic form which in turn created narratives of self and nation. The narratives that underlie this imagery, evidenced in Shammout's works, carry an urgency derived from the "unrelieved intensity" of Palestinian exile (Said 1985:12). Despite this

intensity, their exhibition in contexts that emphasize Canadian multiculturalism potentially bifurcates the images from their historical and contemporary narrative (and political) significance.

On the other hand, Makhoul's works are considered by art critics as important interjections in the understanding of culture and relations of power because they make use of a link between the content and form of his work, on one hand, and his Palestinian identity, on the other (in as much as this link remains regulated by discourses and practices of art). The placing of the works of art along the trajectory suggests their different engagements with both the need for literal tellings and for challenging frames of references around such tellings. The trajectory attempts to illustrate connections between images, forms, art practices and discourses that articulate meanings about the world and produce subjective belongings.

Art furnishes the traffic between the politicized constructs of Palestine and Palestinians and the need to self-identify and self-create. That is, art reflects and constitutes strategies that exiles invent to relocate themselves. It is a means of self-enactment, and a way in which Palestinians in exile challenge and create aesthetic expressions of histories, places of narrative, and subjectivities. Khamis noted to me that "I am a proud Palestinian because I am denied being a simple Palestinian." For Khamis, living in the United States, the charged atmosphere and context since the September 11 hijackings and attacks in New York and Washington compound his sense of alienation. In this context, his works articulate with visual culture, political activism, public education and "the battle over access to public space itself" (Sholette 1998-99:45-62).

The works also reflect different ways of being Palestinian within and beyond the frozen frame of unacknowledged, contested Palestinian history and subjectivity. Memories and postmemories are given artistic form in ways that manifest what remains unspeakable. Each of the artists is producing work that reflects and creates engagements with places and narratives of memory. The places of exhibition shape the efficacy of the works. As with music and dance, paintings contribute to an understanding of identity not as essential, or even multiple or fragmented. Rather art, as with identity, is performative, positioned, translocational, contingent, and critical.

For all the artists, and in very different ways, the specificity of Palestinian history and subjectivity is expressed artistically in ways that resonate and are recognized within common patterns of a shared humanity. While Shammout employs iconographic imagery that creates and reinforces a self-stereotyping of Palestinians, Makhoul works with the perceived polarity of 'East' and 'West.' The power of art to defamiliarize the spectator renders it an important medium for negotiations of the terms and conditions through which identities and differences are signified. At the end of the trajectory, *Zigzag* sets the 'two cultures' (Eastern and Western) off against each other. Makhoul notes:

This could tie into the experience of exile in that the opposing languages in my work in a sense displace one another. The paintings make assimilation impossible because neither language becomes dominant enough to absorb the other. In a way neither belongs to where they are but they are there, occupying the same territory. This seems close to the experience of exile – I am here; I am not here; I belong where I want to be; I don't belong. I cannot speak my language; my language belongs somewhere else; my language is away from me; my language is in me, I dream in my language. (Makhoul 1995:185).

Art engages the artist and the viewer in the making and unmaking of stereotypes. Modes of thought through processes of art and its viewing as familiar frameworks or 'points of view' become defamiliarized. As noted above, in Khamis' words, "the works are a parallel path into the Palestinian story and through them the story is confronted with less resistance" from viewers. The works and the 'stories' they suggest become ways of navigating and relocating for artists and viewers. The following chapters focus on processes of signification (Chapter Four) and embodied performance (Chapter Five). Chapter Four focuses on events surrounding a particular exhibit as they reflect and generate discourses of art, culture, 'Canadian,' and 'Arab' identity in Canada.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LANDS WITHIN ME: CONSTRUCTING NATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL BELONGING

4.1 Introduction

There is a powerful, shared terrain between artistic expression and experiences of subjectivities and identities. Individual geographies of subjectivity and belonging are given language, bodily expression, validation, and social force through artistic expression. Meanings of both art and identities are constituted through institutional, transnational, transcultural, aesthetic, bodily, discursive and social relations. This chapter examines institutional processes and wider discursive contexts that served to shape constructions of ‘Arab’ and ‘Canadian’ art and identity in Canada at a particular historical juncture.

The focus of the chapter is two fold. I examine an exhibition of contemporary art by artists of Arab origin living in Canada. The exhibit was entitled *Ces pays qui m’habite, The Lands Within Me: Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin*, and was held at the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC) in Hull, Quebec, from October 2001 to March 2003. Lands Within Me represented Canada’s first national showcasing of art by artists of Arab origin. Works by 26 artists were featured, and these included paintings, sculptures, installations, ceramic arts, videos, photography, furniture and jewellery.

Events surrounding the opening of *Lands Within Me* served to construct the exhibit as ‘controversial.’ These events began three weeks prior to its scheduled opening, when the CMC announced on its website that *Lands Within Me* would be postponed until further notice. CMC spokespersons then explained that the plane hijackings and attacks two weeks prior on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon in the United States meant that more context about the Arab world needed to be added to the exhibit (“Arab” 2001:8). Protest arose in the form of hundreds of letters mailed to the museum. Federal politicians in the House of Commons, including the Prime Minister, also voiced their protest. The museum subsequently reversed its decision and the exhibit opened on schedule. But, ‘controversy’ again arose a few days before the exhibit opened to the public, when the president of the CMC expressed his “concern” about a particular work of art to be included.

At the centre of the construction of the exhibit as controversial was a work of Jayce Salloum, a Canadian artist of third generation Lebanese origin. I examine the events, representations, and actors involved in the “zones of struggle” around Salloum’s work. Although the CMC reversed its decision, its actions, the media representations and cultural politics generated at this time formed part of the context in which the works of art in *Lands Within Me* acquired meaning and efficacy. The CMC’s actions, its desire to “add context,” and the protests that ensued highlight the stakes and contradictions involved in signifying art and enacting identities—in this case ‘Arab’ art and identities in Canada. As Jonathan Culler reminds,

Context is not fundamentally different from what it contextualizes; context is not given but produced; what belongs to a context is determined by interpretive strategies; contexts are as much in need of elucidation as events; and the meaning of a context is determined by events (Culler quoted in Bal 1996:275).

Further, the narration of what James Clifford terms “contact histories” is contingent and “a matter of mobilised power, of negotiation, of representation constrained by specific audiences” (Clifford 1997:208).

The narrative of this chapter situates the CMC in relation to various actors and discourses that served to constitute meanings around the art and identity of the artists. In the first part of the chapter I explore power and reciprocity negotiated in the planning, design, and narratives of the exhibit. Curatorial decisions regarding labels, texts, and layout of the exhibit are read against the backdrop of the historical role of museums in general, and the CMC mandate in particular. In the second section of the chapter, I focus on the various actors and discourses involved in what I term the manufacture of controversy surrounding the exhibit. I conclude with a note on the need for exhibition strategies that take into account the interconnected nature of political and cultural projects.

4.2 Navigating the museum context

The primary function of museums, to exhibit or expose, “is a form of discourse that obscures its own power structure” (Bal 1996:157). In examining the museum as a cultural and political institution it is important to ask: who is the “we” narrating the “other” (Bal 1996:157)? Museums are embedded in historical relations of dominance and colonization that continue to shape their contemporary roles. Museums emerged with the colonialization of the world and are embedded in the power relations

underpinning colonization through their role in the conservation of “other” cultures (Bal 1996:70). As Clifford notes,

It is important to keep the possibilities for subversion and reciprocity (or relatively benign mutual exploitation) [within the museum] in tension with the long history of “exotic” displays in the West. This history provides a context of enduring power imbalance within and against which the contact work of travel, exhibition, and interpretation occurs. An ongoing ideological matrix governs the understanding of “primitive” people in “civilised” places (Clifford 1997:197).

As such, museums have played an active role in consolidating the colonial enterprise and constituting Orientalist categories of the East and Easterners.

At the national level, museums are major instruments in creating national identities, and constituting the nation as cultured, elevated in taste, and inclusive (Hooper-Greenhill 2000:25). Visual representations are a vital element in symbolising and maintaining national bonds. The museum’s “expository power” sets up a three-way conversation between the museum, the visitor, and the object. While the visitor “knows at an intuitive level” that the exhibit is a representation, the presence of the object can serve to reinforce a singular, authoritative interpretation (Bal 1996:5). Cultural analyst Meike Bal points out that while museum administration or a curator can act as expository agents, expository agency is not equated with an individual and his or her intention alone (Bal 1996:8). In the discussion below, I refer interchangeably to the president of the CMC and the CMC, in general.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ While the decision to postpone the exhibit was made by an individual, and “ideologies, like all cultural practices, are the products of thinkers,” it is important to keep in mind that individual motivations and circumstances exist “together with the social strictures that press collections into cultural service” (Shelton 2000:185-86) or, in this case, out of public service. As Bal asserts, examining the sources of the museum’s actions “will not lead to a name, a scapegoat, or a moral judgement; it will, hopefully, lead to insight into cultural processes” (Bal 1996:20).

The CMC is promoted as the “foremost” cultural museum in Canada. Located in Hull, Quebec, across the Ottawa River from the capital, it is mandated with housing and preserving Canadian national collective memory. Its mandate includes attempts to create a notion of unity between aboriginal peoples and ‘New World’ cultures, and is manifested in the impressive physicality of the building complex itself.⁶⁹ Another aspect of its role is to “look at the civilizations of origin of Canadian immigrants” (MacDonald and Alsford 1990).

Controversy has not evaded the museum’s interpretation of its mandate. It has been criticised for the prominence of totem poles in its main permanent exhibit, which is seen to emphasise a colonialist and monolithic view of indigenous cultures. The museum also generated criticism for refusing for many years to mention in its exhibition texts long-acknowledged events in Canada’s history such as the expulsion of Acadians by the British more than two centuries ago (Gessell 2001d:A6).

The CMC is mandated to not only display other cultures but to facilitate their incorporation into a collective national identity (MacDonald and Alsford 1990). This situates it within tensions and contradictions that are particular to the social and policy

⁶⁹ The CMC is housed in a complex of buildings that are architecturally remarkable and symbolically compelling. Two main buildings seem to rise up from the earth in concentric and ululating curves and mounds, meant to represent indigenous Canadian geography and culture. The design of the buildings symbolises Canada’s physical landscape at the end of the Ice Age. Curatorial facilities are located in what looks like windswept sand dunes, symbolising the Canadian Shield. The other main building, the ‘Glacier Wing,’ contains exhibition galleries, theatres and other public spaces. Between the two, water cascades down stepped waterfalls that are meant to symbolise the streams created by glacial melt. The curves of the Canadian Shield Wing “represent the rocky outcrops of the prehistoric landscape—eroded, smoothed, and undercut by those rushing streams” (MacDonald and Alsford 1990). The design architect of the building, Douglas Cardinal, is a Native Canadian. Indigenous symbolism is also worked into the architecture. The doorway of the main entrance is, in fact, a huge ‘mouth’ of a mask that

contexts of Canadian multiculturalism. As the population of Canada becomes more diverse, there is increasing interest in having this diversity represented within national cultural processes. In the process, borders of “minority” communities intersect with “national” cultural spaces. As Clifford notes, “museums that once articulated the cultural core or high ground now appear as sites of passage and contestation” for communities (Clifford 1997:210). This role produces contradictions that have been reflected in controversy surrounding other exhibits in Canada.⁷⁰ That communities are themselves diverse necessitates more complex navigations between museums and those whose art and culture is represented in exhibits.

One way the museum can transcend its own discourse is by enlisting visiting curators from outside the museum. The *Lands Within Me* curator and assistant curator both herald from within the Museum of Civilization. The curatorial team, though, enlisted an outside organization to organise the publicity and events of a ten-day cultural event staged at the museum in conjunction with the exhibit. Additionally, the curator is Syrian-born and as such is a member of the community that is featured. This gave her an insider status amongst the artists that was evident in my discussions with them.

In planning and conceiving of *Lands Within Me* the curator, Aida Kaouk, navigated contradictions presented by the role of the CMC. The curator wished to complicate

symbolises a passage from “the world of the present to the world of the past” (MacDonald and Alsford 1990).

⁷⁰ such as *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada’s First Peoples* at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary during the 1998 Winter Olympics, and the Royal Ontario Museum’s exhibit entitled *Into the Heart of Africa*, in Toronto, during 1989 and 1990. For an analysis of the latter, see Eva Mackey (1995: 403-32).

notions of unified identity. In the planning stages of the exhibit, Kaouk noted:⁷¹

The exhibit is not about Arabs but about immigration and *métissage* [mixing]. *Ces pays qui m'habitent* implies multiple belongings. It's very important to bring out this issue of *métissage* as it allows one to escape a narrow way of looking at identity. The focus is not multiple identities but multiple belongings. The approach is distinctly different. I don't want to talk about 'Arabs' as mainstream museums talk about Vietnamese peoples etc.⁷²

Kaouk did not wish to make the artists' 'Arab' identities the focus. On the other hand, the exhibit was not intended to feature "art" either. Kaouk explained:

We've decided to work with works of art but it's very clear that it's an exhibition that presents works of art but it's not ON art as such. It's not an exhibition, for example, that will analyse the artistic production of immigrant artists, or read anything into the artistic production. We have themes and we have asked the artists to dialogue with the theme or we found that their works were dialoguing with the theme or topics and we asked them to participate, or some dossiers were so strong and the artist was so interesting that we went to see them and asked if they would be interested in dialoguing with the theme of the exhibit.

Notwithstanding the validity of Kaouk's aims, the context within which Kaouk was working was indeed a mainstream museum that "talks about Vietnamese peoples." I asked Kaouk whether she had any ideas for the design of the exhibit that would counter the prescriptive notions of identity that the museum mandate might reflect or that the viewing public may bring with them.

Stereotypes go when you start to know. The whole event is about letting people in. One of the effects and goals is to enlarge people's view—I don't want to say 'educate.'

Kaouk clearly attempted to navigate the epistemological authority resting in the

⁷¹ Unless otherwise attributed, the several quotes of Kaouk in this chapter are her responses to my interview with her conducted at the CMC, 9 June 1999.

⁷² Kaouk refers to the CMC's exhibit, *Boat People No Longer: Vietnamese Canadians*, from 15 October 1998 to 20 September 1999. The museum's website text of the exhibit contains a narrative that strives to move the viewer from conceiving of the Vietnamese refugees as anonymous "boat people" to accepting them as part of the "mosaic" of Canadian multiculturalism. Nonetheless, within the museum narrative, the Vietnamese are reconstituted as 'other.'

museum context. In this way, she seemed to attempt to make room for the works to create their own spaces of knowledge and experience. Nonetheless, there is a tension inherent in assuming “stereotypes go” when confronted with art in a highly mitigated context.

The assistant curator also relayed her grappling with the theme of the exhibit, looking ‘between’ English and French understandings of the term *immigrant* in order to explain the focus of the exhibit.

The term doesn't translate well from the French, 'expérience immigrant' which denotes less 'experience of the immigrant' and more something like 'migratory experience.' The emphasis is on immigrant as an adjective rather than a noun, which is more clear in the French usage. We're understanding the immigrant experience as really large and not just about leaving one country and going to another, with passports and papers involved. It's about identity, and exile, displacement and identities are reconstructed. And if you are a child of an immigrant or even a grandchild of an immigrant you have more than one identity especially if you have heard other languages, other food and such, then you have an immigrant experience, a very different one from your parents but nonetheless an immigrant experience.⁷³

The conceptualization of the exhibit involved, then, attempts to conceive of identity through artistic processes and beyond state-centric foci. The artists are first, second, and third generation Canadians of Arab origin. The inclusion of artists who themselves and their parents were born in Canada potentially widens the notion of immigration, but might also serve to underline their outsider status. I wonder whether second or third generation Canadians of European or Scandinavian origin would as easily be framed and conceived of by the viewing public as “immigrants.” One artist described his negotiation of the museum context and the boundaries implied in the theme of the exhibit:

The CMC deals with history, the past, or things brought from somewhere else. So suddenly you are an outsider. You are not in the mainstream of the city. The city has its own gallery of contemporary art. You are at the museum and from the first moment your work is there you are an outsider. And on top of it the theme is about being an outsider from another place. Whether you like it or not this creates a situation for you that you have to deal with [as an artist]. I think the best way of dealing with it is to do less 'traditional' art, to minimise the effect of being in the museum and the title of the exhibit of 'the immigrant experience,' 'letters from home' and so on and so on. So it becomes almost a rebellion of the artist to do something very contemporary to bring it more to the mainstream, to the daily, present life of the city... Everything is geared in the end [for the viewer] to say there is an outsider culture with outsider artists producing outsider art and it fits very well here.... The museum itself is a boundary, the title itself is a boundary. What do you know about my experience? Well, that I emigrated from the Middle East. What do you know about my culture? The idea presented with the title and everything creates boundaries for these artists vis-à-vis this society, the community. And I don't think this is healthy.⁷⁴

In addition to the theme and museum context, the exhibit itself suggested notions of identity through its name, the labels accompanying the works, texts interspersed in the exhibit, and the layout of the works in relation to each other. These construct frames within which the works are viewed, and are reviewed below.

Naming:

To its credit the exhibit reflects curatorial grapplings with the context and role of the Canadian Museum of Civilization. "Arab art," as part of the title, was eliminated early on by the curator as she wished to problematise the notion of a unified identity shared by artists of various Arab origins. The idea of *multiple* 'Lands Within' the artists answered both curators' and artists' desire to foreground the multiplicity of identifications and cultural contexts which constitute the artists' 'immigrant

⁷³ This and other quotes of the assistant curator are from my interview with her at the CMC, 19 January 1999.

⁷⁴ Personal interview, 7 May 1999.

experience.’ The personal pronoun of, (*The Lands Within*) ‘Me’ engages the artist as subject and author of the exhibit. On the other hand, the title also potentially serves to obfuscate the myriad ways in which this subjectivity is designated and situated through museum and exhibition processes. My intent here is to underline contradictions in the display of ‘other’ cultures in a museum context that manifest in language.

The curator also negotiated the contradiction that arises in featuring art within a framework that emphasizes the ‘cultural’ (albeit mixed) heritage of communities.

During planning stages, she stated that, “regarding Canadian multiculturalism, Canada is a country of communities, not of citizens. This enables people to express themselves and their culture.” On the other hand, one artist, hoping that the museum would define culture through identity rather than the reverse, noted (prior to the opening of the exhibit),

The difficulty is to get away from the word culture with capital ‘C’ ...Through identity you define the culture, rather than the opposite. So, instead of saying ‘Arab culture,’ you say an artist whose identity represents certain segments of this culture... The exhibit shouldn’t be seen as [presenting] Arab culture through the artists. But, rather, certain artists whose identity is reflected in their work and this work is a reflection of a larger dynamic which is, let’s say, Arab culture and how they see it from within their experience in Canada. I hope the exhibit will deal with the identity of the individual rather than the identity of the whole culture and I think the core idea of the exhibit should be ‘displacement’ whether by choice or force, and this displacement of course creates identity and through this identity comes the question of culture.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Personal interview, 7 May 1999.

Labelling:

The language of labels and texts within exhibits can potentially open up or, alternatively, reconfirm the one-sided power of the exhibit to create particular conceptions of culture and identity. A concern I bore in mind in walking through the exhibit was whether the texts and labels overrule the works of art with a simplifying narrative (Bal 1996:172). The labels in the exhibit provide a kind of skeletal outline of the biographical 'travels' of the artists that ultimately ended in Canada. The labels accompanying each piece of art cites the artists' sometimes multiple countries of origin, underlining both movement between and the 'fixity' of national prescriptions. De-emphasized were differences such as religion, generation or class.

As Hooper-Greenhill notes, "the nation' is a powerful and enduring master narrative" (Hooper-Greenhill 2000:25). The inclusions and exclusions that are rendered through labelling are one technique in which the narrative of the nation is evoked. In designating an artist as Iraqi, there is less room for the visitor to extrapolate, for example, a Chaldean Christian Iraqi identity or an artist's subjective navigations as, for example, 'an Arab artist with green eyes.'

The labels do address visitors' explicit desire to know more about the countries from which the artists came. A pre-exhibit survey taken by the museum, asking visitors what they would want to get from an exhibit "of immigrant artists," revealed that those surveyed wanted to know more about the countries of origin of artists. The findings of the museum's survey of visitors illustrate the tensions that the curators navigated from

the start of the exhibit. The curators did not want to designate the artists as ‘Arabs from other countries’ but wished to highlight their work as a “métissage” that emanates from artists’ circuitous routes and influences of several cultures and ‘lands’—including Canada. But, the curators’ own decision-making process is not made apparent to the museum visitor. It is just such interpretive processes and decisions that would allow the visitor and the art itself more interpretive leeway and space.

Also erased in the labels are historical ruptures that predate the establishment of states. One artist, Sami Zubi, is denoted as from Nazareth, Israel.⁷⁶ Sami is Palestinian. Upon reading the label I remembered my father’s wish on his deathbed that the newspaper obituary record his place of birth as “Nazareth, Palestine.” While Zubi was born after the creation of the state of Israel, the historical ruptures that form his Palestinian identity are erased in the label.

Text – hanging panels:

Upon entering the *Lands Within Me* exhibit, visitors were met with large black texts printed on two hanging panels. The panels were wide strips of silky, translucent material offset from the walls behind them. Several panels were interspersed throughout the exhibit. The introductory panels were clearly the voice of the curator and/or the museum and were worded with the apparent intent of introducing the public to the works of art. Other panels were less clear in terms of the authorship or ‘voice,’ and contained quotes that were apparently the words of artists but not attributed to any

particular artist. This ambiguity of authorship in the hanging panels is an instance of the exhibit investing the artists and divesting them of subjectivity at the same time (Bal 1996:255-287).

The initial hanging panel read, in part:

These artists from several Arab countries, like all Canadians of this origin, present an identity *profile* that is generally hybrid because it is traversed by a great diversity of languages, ethnicities, religions and cultures [emphasis added].

The word “profile” caught my attention as this term took on a particular charge following September 11, 2001. Profiling was variously proposed and denounced as a process of directing increased security measures at individuals who were perceived as posing a potential security threat by virtue of their Arab, Muslim or South Asian identity or appearance. The term profile in the exhibition panel was used in a different sense. Nonetheless, the charged context of the weeks following September 11 seemed to echo through the term.

Layout:

“I asked the cooing dove sitting next to me: Neighbour, can you feel my inner state?”

--Translation of the Arabic text in a painting by Shwan, one of the artists featured in *The Lands Within Me*

The language of display reflects (though rarely overtly acknowledges) a tension between the telling and the showing of art. Labels and text accompanying works, and the display and order of the works themselves are “two modes of exposition that are

⁷⁶ Zubi created an installation piece for the exhibit, comprising of Plexiglas doors wrapped in and suspended by ropes. It is called *Jerusalem: A Gate of Hope* (2000-2001) (see Figure 4., and

meant to collaborate, but do not always do so” (Bal 1996:10). Exhibits create another narrative through the layout of works. The “connections between things” on the museum wall are syntactical, and function as a kind of speech act in which the viewer is implicated (Bal 1996: 87-88). In fact, Bal suggests, the subject matter of images can sometimes become subordinated to the visual effect of their combination (Bal 1996:117).

Housed in the museum’s art gallery space, the physicality of the rooms emphasised artistic rather than the ‘ethnic’ attributes of the exhibit (see Figure 4.1). There were three main sections within which the works were divided, and a wide hallway connecting them. The arrangement of works seemed to suggest a progressive intermixing of cultures. The following discussion highlights works by a handful of the 26 artists featured in the exhibit, to convey a sense of the exhibit as a whole. The works at the start of the ‘walk’ were two artists’ very colourful depictions of Montreal winter streets, painted in bright colours and curving lines (see Figure 4.2). They conveyed to me, and to a few friends who accompanied me on different visits to the exhibit, a very pictorial and social mixing of cultures and artistic influences. One of the artists, Joseph Moukhtar, notes (in the exhibition catalogue)⁷⁷, “I love the blending of immigrant cultures with Canadian and Quebec cultures. In time, we shall see the birth of a new culture...” (Kaouk 2003:84).

A side room included large installation pieces and jewellery and furniture. These works seemed to speak to the ways in which bodies navigate two or more cultures. Zacharia

takes up a corner of a room, rising above the gaze of the viewer.

⁷⁷ The catalogue was not available until the exhibit itself had ended.

notes, “Maybe the fragmentation of my identity accounts for why I always ended up working with collage” (Kaouk 2003:110). Zakharia’s piece, *Lebanon-Canada via Bahrain* (1998) evokes three dimensional space and time in the images as well as the form (see Figure 4.3) Binbrek’s piece consists of two vanity tables facing each other, with items on the tables that reflect the different beauty and social rituals that the artist ‘travels’ between (Kaouk 2003:54). The tables have their mirrors removed “to show the flow from one side to the other” (Kaouk 2003:54).

Around a corner, Liliane Karnouk’s furniture pieces speak to bodily navigations of different environments and her attempts to cross bridges between disparate contexts (see Figure 4.4). Karnouk’s pieces took “what felt like an eternity” to paint, during which she took “time to remember and time to forget.” She noted:

I chose to design furniture because I could not find contemporary items that linked my Islamic carpet and my computer table, nor could I find passages within my own mind that connected the two worlds of experience. It made sense to adopt the Islamic philosophy of art, which unites the functional with the aesthetic, and to explore plain geometry and colour, because I needed time to remember and time to forget (Kaouk 2003:68).

Further along were works that ‘play’ with Islamic design and calligraphy. Aldin Rashid’s works emanate from his desire to “pass on to present and future generations the good works of my ancestors” (Kaouk 2003:89). Another artist’s use of Arabic script is bold, bright, and playful. Shwan’s paintings of common Arabic sayings, public announcements, and Qur’anic verses bypass the almost sacred look of Arabic calligraphy and splash colour and painted handwriting together in a way that evokes the language in laughter and social banter (see Figure 4.5).



Figure 4.1: A view of the first section of the exhibit *The Lands within Me: Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin* (2001-2003). Photo by Harry Foster



Figure 4.2: Joseph Mukhtour, *Montréal, St-Denis en hiver*, (*Montreal, St. Denis in Winter*) (1995), oil on canvas. Photo by Harry Foster

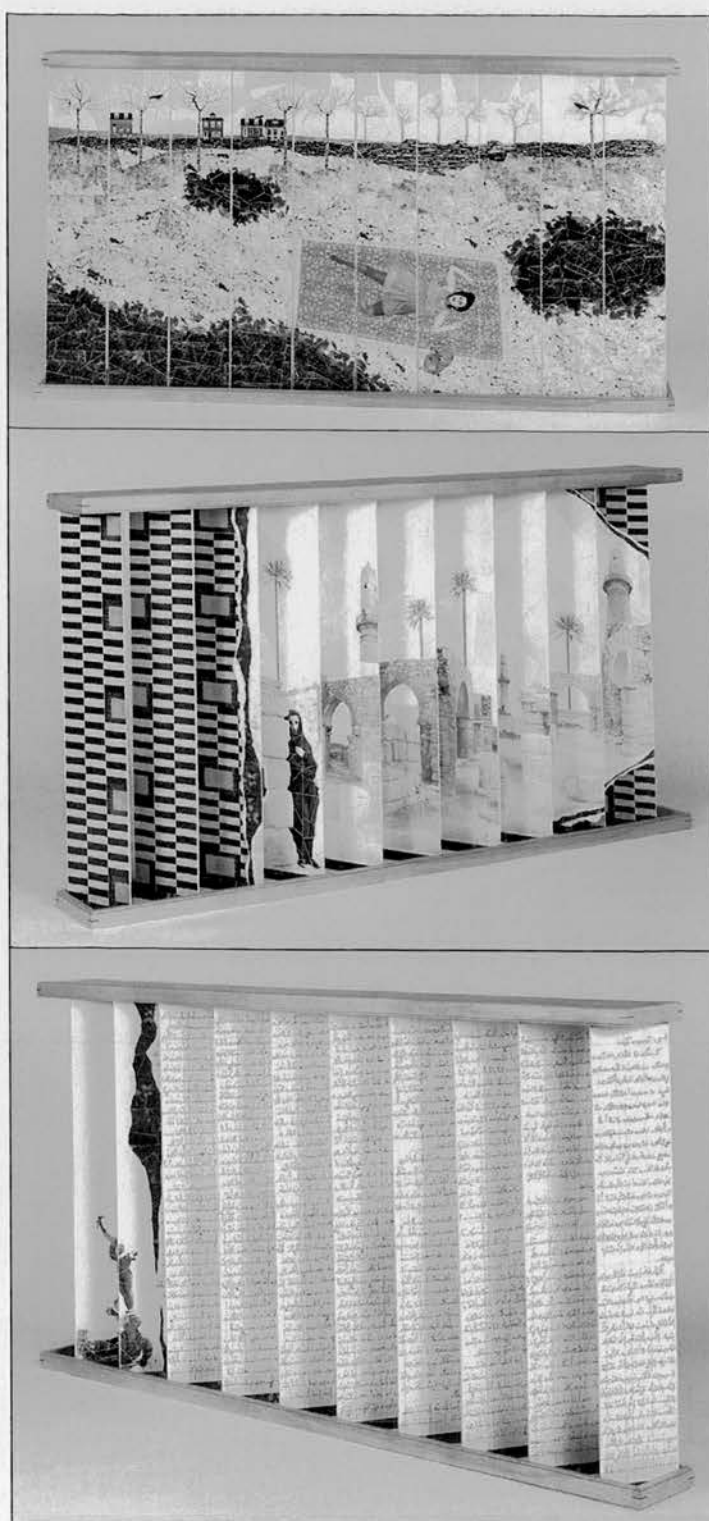


Figure 4.3: Camille Zakharia, *Lebanon-Canada, via Bahrain* (1998), photo-collage and gouache on paper, mounted on triangular wooden columns. Photo by Harry Foster

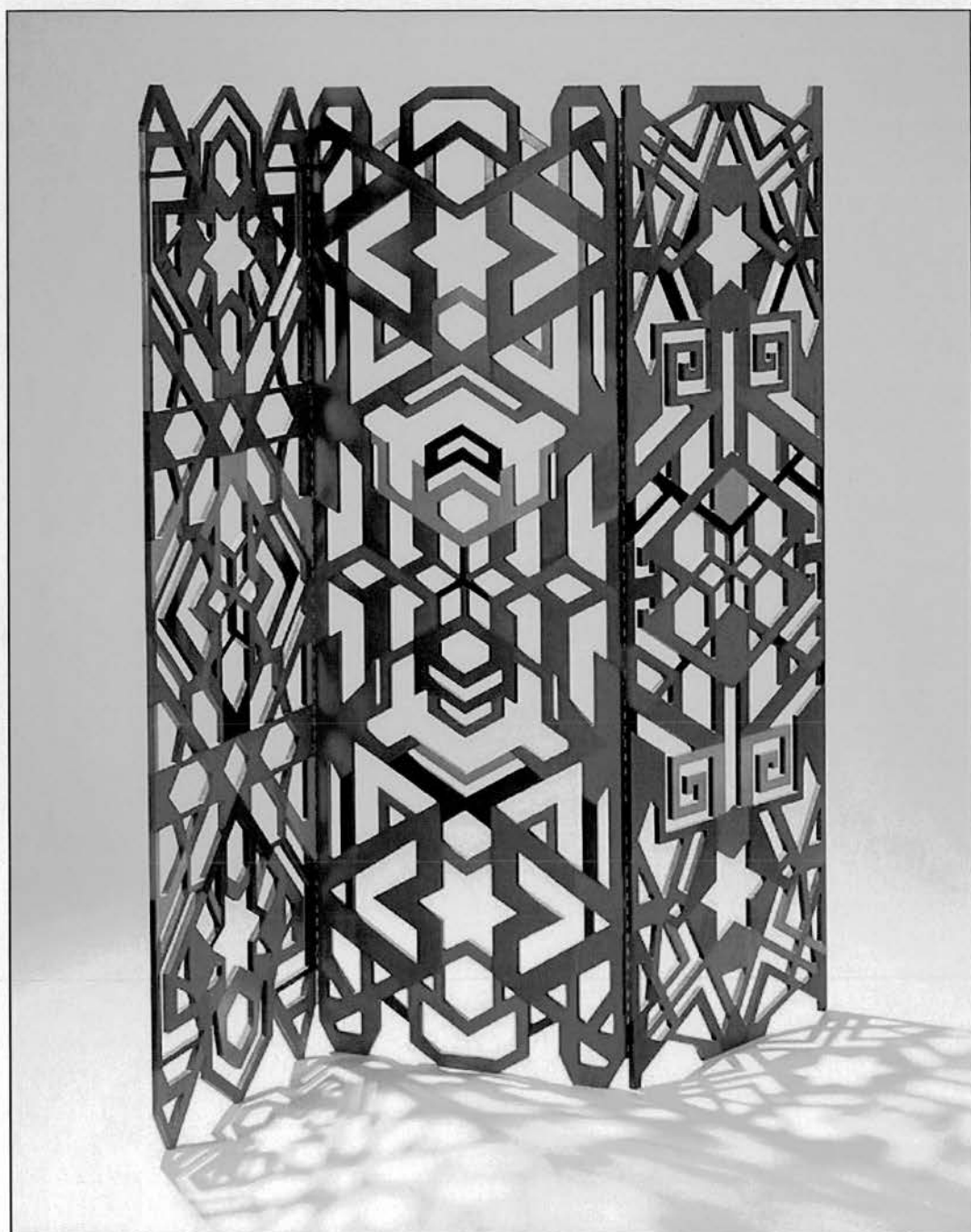


Figure 4.4: Liliane Karnouk, *Folding screen* (1997), acrylic on fibreboard.
Photo by Harry Foster



Figure 4.5: Shwan, *Expression from Arab popular culture, "A lover leaves, and a thousand others show up"* (1996), mixed media on paper
Photo by Harry Foster

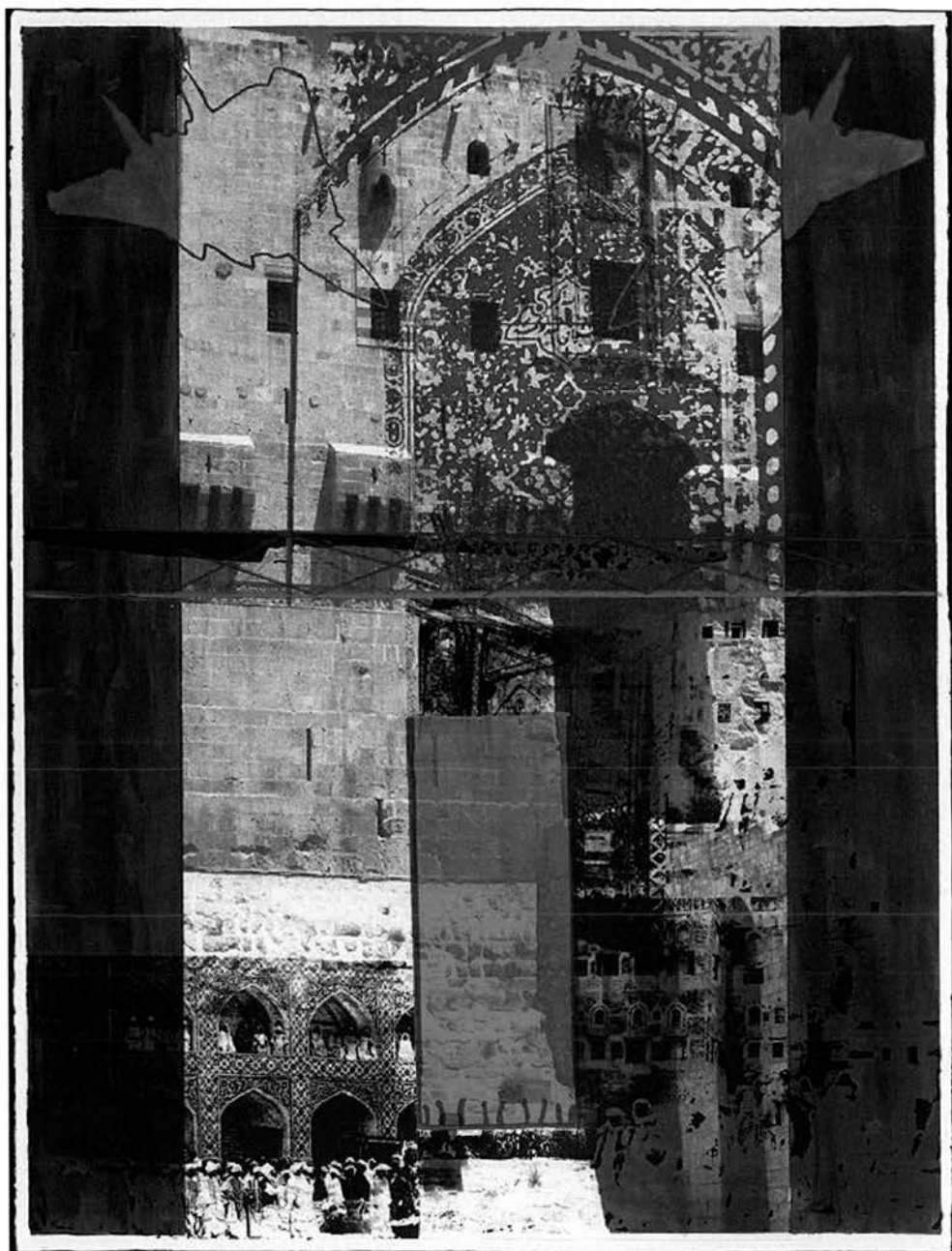


Figure 4.6: Farouk Kaspaules, ... *and at night we leave our dreams on window sill, memory of a place.* (detail) (2000), wall installation: mixed media on BFK Rives paper
Photo by Harry Foster

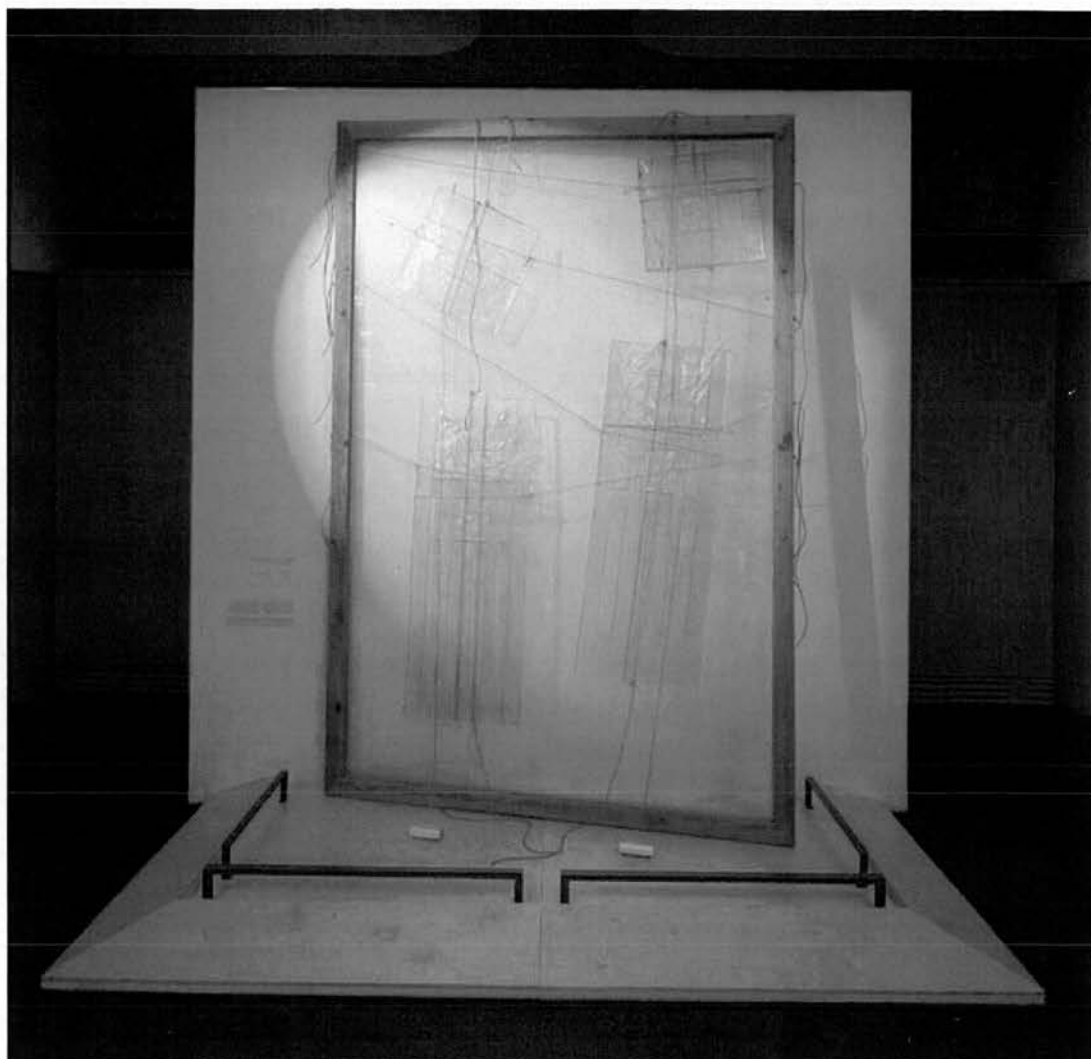


Figure 4.7: Sami Zubi, *Jerusalem: A Gate of Hope* (2000-2001), wall installation: molded acrylic resin mounted on a wooden structure, plastic sheet. Photo by Harry Foster



Figure 4.8: Jayce Salloum, *Everything and nothing*
(from the ongoing project, "*untitled*") (1999-2000),
video installation
Photo by Harry Foster

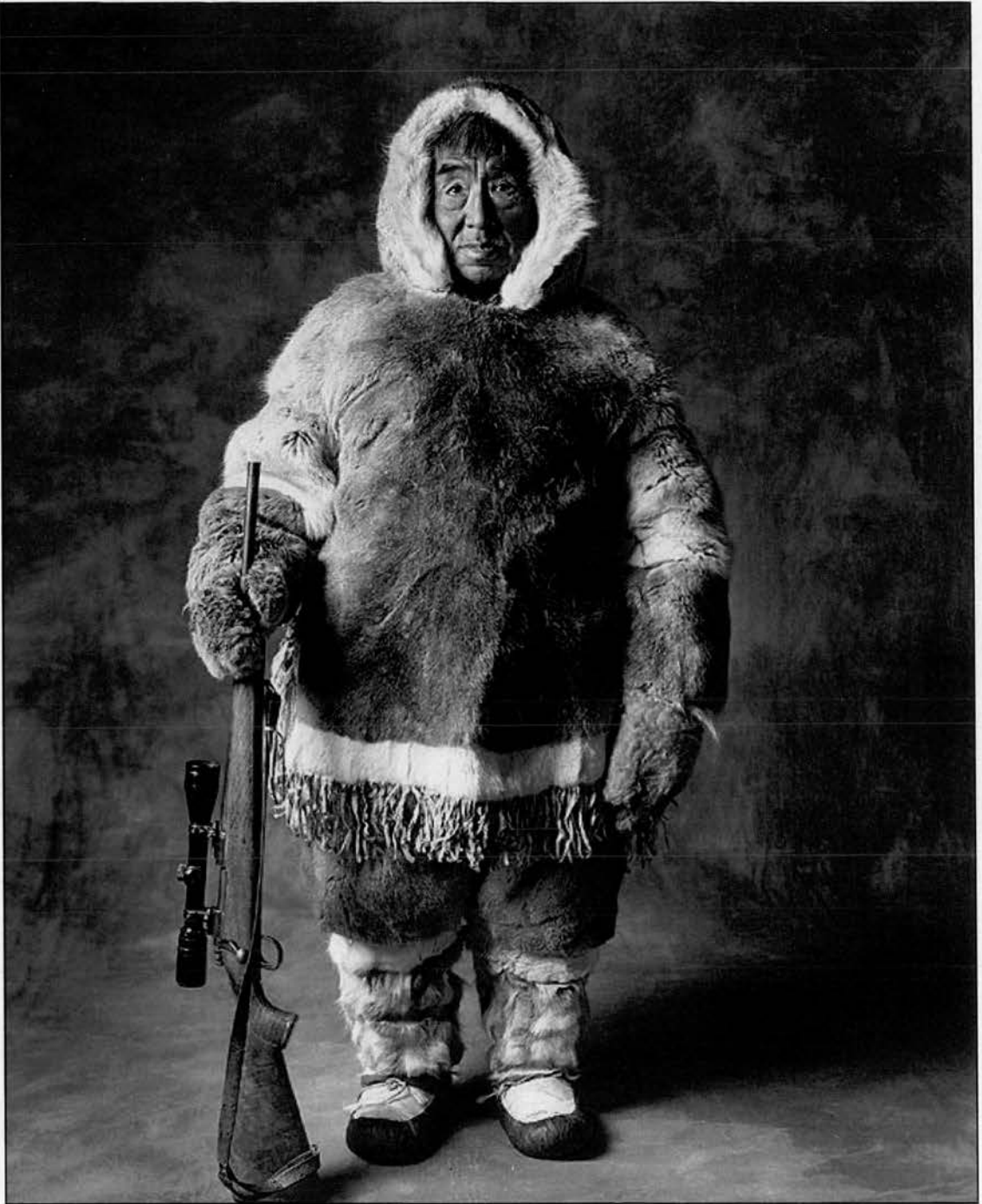


Figure 4.9: Karim Rholem, *Gamilie Akeeagok 66 years old*, died in 1997

Ajuittuuq (Grise Fiord), N.W.T. From the series *Uvagut : Portrait d'un people (Uvagut: Portrait of a People)* (July 1996), gelatine silver print.

Photo by Harry Foster

Works in the middle rooms seemed to make connections between the riches of cultural heritage and the dissonance created by politics. Farouk Kaspaules' piece is a series of 21 prints of overlaid images of stone statues of Sumerian gods and goddesses are layered with scripts from various languages, photographs of carvings, buildings, ruins, and miniatures. It is entitled, *...and at night we leave our dreams on the window sill, memory of a place* (2000) (see Figure 4.6). In an interview I conducted with him, Farouk explained, "The imagery used is random. I didn't want a logical system underlying the choice of images because that's not the way memory works...the viewer has also to engage with it and to see what they want to get out of it. That's why I didn't want to have any chronological order." Kaspaules, a Chaldean, Sumerian, and Arab Iraqi Canadian states, "I strive in my work to refer the circumstances around me to broader geopolitical and social questions—affirming both culture and identity, on one hand, and my artistic position vis-à-vis the political and the aesthetic, on the other hand" (Kaouk 2003:72). In the same room is Sami Zubi's installation, entitled *Jerusalem: A Gate of Hope* (2000-2001), (see Figure 4.7) comprising of resin window panes hung precariously with cords within a wooden frame.

On one wall of the fairly expansive central hallway of the exhibit there is a row of photographs of each artist in turn. The museum commissioned two of the artists in the exhibit to travel across the country and photograph the artists. The row of images along the hallway forms a kind of bridge--both between the different rooms and between the viewer and the art. Each artist is photographed in or around their home, sometimes surrounded with family members. Together, they convey a sense of belonging to a shared group identity. The photos conveyed an intimacy, providing a peek into the lives

of the artists. I viewed them initially on the opening night of the exhibit, and amidst the media coverage highlighting the so-called controversial nature of the exhibit. In this context, I felt uneasy about this line-up of images. It seemed to imply a need to affirm the humanity of the artists, rather than have that as a given. The photos retain some degree of status as artefact and seemed to reflect another instance of investing while divesting the artists of subjectivity (Bal 1996:255-287).

Turning another corner into the final large room of the exhibit were works that play with form and subject positions of the viewers. Jayce Salloum's video installation is one of these. Salloum's piece was the 'lightening rod' around which the 'controversial' nature of the exhibit revolved, and I discuss it at some length here. While Salloum's piece became the focus of the spurious debate on whether the exhibit was 'acceptable,' his work powerfully challenges frameworks within which knowledge is created. Salloum is a video artist of third generation Lebanese origin.

Entitled *everything and nothing (from the ongoing project, 'untitled')*, the work comprised of five video screens set up around seating that allows for viewing and listening of each in turn (see Figure 4.8). On my first visit to the exhibit, the seating in front of the video screens was filled up and there was a small group waiting to watch the videos. On my second visit, I sat and watched the video featuring Soha Bechara, a Lebanese National Resistance fighter who was imprisoned and tortured at the Khiam detention centre in South Lebanon. The camera frame remains fixed on Bechara, who responds in a gentle stream of Arabic to Salloum's questions posed from behind his camera in a shyly hesitant French. Beshara's Arabic is translated into English subtitles

for the viewer and it eventually becomes apparent that Salloum does not understand her words or story as she talks to him through the camera. The viewer is brought into a circle of delicate human courage, woven from Bechara's graceful and simple shaping of her story of how she coped with and survived her long detention. And her story is buoyed by the lightness and immediacy of the exchange between Salloum and Beshara, lent by one's realization that Salloum understands nothing of her Arabic as she seeks just the right phrases and metaphors.

The work powerfully moves between private human dignity and its telling. The misjoined languages seem to almost clear away room for an intimacy between the viewer and the meaning of Bechara's words. And Salloum's questions, barely articulated in a very splintered French, engages the viewer from within an 'English Canadian' context that is also richly nuanced. I sat through the video mesmerised by the face, mouth, words and hands of Bechara carefully giving form to prison experiences and struggles for human dignity that are clearly out of the usual reference points of most viewers. I relished Bechara's easy acceptance of Salloum's awkward French, and I thought about the boundaries of art and history. The video teeters between a delicate telling and an intimate, encompassing listening, in the midst of which Bechara refers to the "struggle against Israeli occupation." These words in a multimedia installation of exile voices from former Yugoslavia and Lebanon were enough to have the work and the artist catapulted out of an artistic discourse and into ones that attempt to place exclusionary boundaries around 'Canadian art,' 'immigrant culture,' and rights of belonging.

Salloum's work is indicative of how works of art can foster a rethinking of the very conditions that produce the terms of discourse on identity and belonging. Art Critic Michael Allen notes: "In an exhibit that urges artists to share stories from which to cull information about the Arab-Canadian experience, Salloum's video takes information in order to refuse the very informational conditions of identity-based storytelling" (Allen 2001:175). Allen suggests that Salloum's video-mediated storytelling "refuses to seek or articulate the sort of information demanded by the listener...there is no one piece of information to be culled, and no one story to be heard...but a mediation on the very problem of the path by which the story is told" (Allen 2001:175).

To its credit, the museum's website carried extensive quotes from the artists that provided readings of the works beyond the discourses of the museum. The exhibit website records Salloum's own positioning within the art form. Salloum writes:

The use of images/representations of Lebanon and Beirut has an extensive history in the West and in Lebanon itself. . . . My own position as an image maker is situated somewhere between being a family member, visitor, tourist, guide and unwilling orientalist . . . never occupying any one position for too long, fluctuating peripatetically between the act of re-producing and the deconstruction of such an act and its object.⁷⁸

De Duve notes that a work of art is "constituted through those events that arrest the self-evidence of one's identity and that open other possibilities that retroactively reinterpret it" (de Duve 1991:xvi). The works of art featured in the exhibit, *The Lands Within Me*, speak to subjective experiences of immigration, and of contingent and negotiated identities. Some of them were conceived long before the exhibit opened while others

⁷⁸ The website address is <http://www.civilization.ca/cultur/cespays/payinte.html>

seem almost to anticipate the production of its ‘controversy.’⁷⁹ The works engage audiences in expressions, translations and reinterpretations of the art, history, even humanity of Arab culture, memory, identity and subjectivity in Canada. In the somewhat charged context of wider discourses and cultural politics, the works of art presented challenges to dominant discourses, while the exhibition layout and museum discourses seemed to reinforce others.

An example of the latter is found in the placing of the final work of art included in the exhibit. The piece is a photograph by Karim Rholem *Gamilie Akeeagok 66 years old* (July 1996) (see Figure 4.9). While the power of the image moves the viewer beyond any facile reading of it, its placement at the very end of the exhibit and its subject matter—an image of a member of a Northern Canadian community—seemed to hint at a particular message. This message, for me, implied that ‘Arab Canadians’ might attain full membership within the “Canadian mosaic” by virtue of their appropriation of The North and objectification of its people, who have come to stand for the essence of Canadian identity. Again, the art works themselves defy the exhibit’s own narrative as well as my own narrative. What I point out here is that there is a tension between the works and the meanings ascribed to them (including those implied in the exhibit’s layout) by virtue of their location within processes of exhibition and museum discourses. The following section focuses on a debate about the exhibit that, for a short time, shaped the terms within which the works took on meaning in public discourse.

⁷⁹ The initial starting date of the exhibit was one year previous to its eventual opening. Its opening was delayed in order to allow for an extension of an exhibit on Canada’s war effort, which the museum wished to hold during 2000. Additionally, the museum requested that artists provide the museum with the final piece one year prior to that. Hence, many of the works were in their final stages of production two years prior to the opening and to, as indicated above, to the newly charged context of ‘post September 11.’

4.3 Exhibiting ‘controversy,’ containing the subjects of art

I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects. – Frantz Fanon⁸⁰

Display takes place within relations of power and discourse. The controversy surrounding the exhibit *Lands Within Me* brought to the fore discourses and relations of power that underlie particular gazes or cultural screens that are otherwise less apparent. There was a manufacturing of controversy, as mentioned, that began with the museum’s announcement on its website two weeks following the September 11 events, that the exhibit *Lands Within Me* would be postponed indefinitely (Gessell 2001a:A3). The museum had removed all traces of the exhibition from its website, and then re-established the website with the latter part of the name of the exhibit, *Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin*, removed. Shortly thereafter, the museum announced it was reviewing all of its fall programming, in view of current national and international events (Gessell 2001d:A6).

Stephen Inglis, director general of research and collections for the museum, explained that the exhibit was postponed because the museum did not want the exhibit to be viewed by the public “through the frame” of the events of September 11. The museum wanted to add “proper context” to the exhibit (Gessel 2001c:A7). The museum suggested there was a need for distinction between the two events—the violence of the hijackings, the attacks on the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon on one hand, and the works of art, on the other. The president and CEO of the museum explained further

that the events of September 11 convinced him and his staff that, "the planned show focusing on Arabic origins should be supplemented with information about other peoples and other religions in the region to make the exhibit a better learning experience" (Winsor 2001b).

The battle over whether the show must go on was national in scope, involved the highest levels of government influence (that included a public statement from the Prime Minister), engaged widespread (some internet-spawned) protest, and resulted in a brief proliferation of media coverage that focused on the question of whether or not the exhibit and the art it featured were indeed controversial. In the meantime, what travelled through various sites of cultural politics were narratives (and counter narratives) of belonging, culture, and identity. The following discussion looks at these discourses that accompanied various actions and strategies surrounding the exhibit's opening.

The museum:

In the museum president's explanation of his position, he seemed to define the Canadian public as excluding Arab Canadians. Victor Rabinovich explained, prior to the opening of the exhibit:

It was [sic] an art show, not the kind of thing we usually do. We're a social-history museum, and after September 11, we saw right away that *the public* would want to do more than look at these paintings. They'd want to *know* about the countries that these artists came from. So we decided to do what a museum should do: Research the countries, have essays written, prepare texts to accompany the works of art (Conlogue 2001a:R3; emphasis added).

80 Frantz Fanon (1986:109).

Rabinovitch did add thousands of words of “context” in the previous year to the museum’s main permanent exhibition in Canada Hall. The *Lands Within Me* exhibit had been well into its planning by the time of his arrival as president of the museum (“Arab-Canadian” 2001:37). The curator had already begun to conceive and plan the exhibit with the aim of challenging the context of mainstream museum treatments of ethnic groups.

The museum president’s desire to do what museums do best and explain the art works, represents an attempt to denote what is and is not art and, by extension, the efficacy or functions of art. The museum attempted also to maintain some of its long shadow in constructing ‘us’ and ‘them.’ The effect of adding context is to add realism and subsume the role of art and culture within larger questions of social harmony. The museum’s actions certainly do not seem to reflect an understanding of culture and artistic expressions as vital means by which communities constitute and reproduce themselves, internally and in relation to wider processes and discursive constructs.

The museum’s attempt to add context also assumes neutrality in the museum context and processes. Rather, the engraving of context to representations is inherently political. Implied are particular discourses of culture as a tool of social management (Bennett 1995). What is at stake is the power to exclude communities from the imagined collectivity that comprises the nation. Rangan Chakravarty and Nandini Goopta rightly note that,

While it is now widely accepted that the nation as a community is imagined discursively, it is also the case that the imagination of the nation is historically produced through political struggles of various social groups. Hence, the discursive forging of a nation is not only about the inclusive construction of a

community but is also crucially about exclusions. The process of the construction of a narrative of the nation represents continuing ideological struggles within communities to entrench certain meanings and to achieve particular dominant identities around those meanings, in the face of heterogeneity and difference at given moments in history. National identity, as articulated and represented in nationalist discourses, is a terrain of struggle: one in which competing meanings and identities have to be resolved, marginalised, appropriated or displaced to develop and present a self-conscious and authoritative national identity. (Chakravarty and Goopta 2000:90).

Within this “terrain of struggle,” the museum is itself a site of contestation navigated by the artists and their works.

Official response:

The museum’s decision came at a time when the Canadian federal government was actively attempting to build bridges to “the Arab-Canadian community” (Gessell 2001d:A6). The Prime Minister was also under an intense political and media attention following the attacks in the United States. Media coverage of the Prime Minister’s various responses to the general post-September 11 situation often mentioned, either favourably or otherwise, his criticism of the CMC exhibit.

The Prime Minister announced that the museum made "the wrong decision... If it is good for March 2002 it is good for October 2001" ("Art" 2001:69). For this, unusually, he received a standing ovation in the House of Commons from members of all party affiliations. This response is indicative, I suggest, of how quickly the community associated with the exhibit, ‘Canadian Arabs,’ had come to represent a touchstone in public discourse following the events of September 11. For one, the government had been criticised as falling short of the actions of the American government in attempting

to stave off attacks on Arab Canadians.

Some media reports extolled the Prime Minister's criticism of the museum. Others thought it proof of his misplaced priorities: "The PM has barely shown a flicker of emotion for the thousands of people who died in New York City, and yet he gets passionate in the House of Commons over a delayed exhibit by Arab-Canadian artists" ("Business" 2001:15). In other coverage, defending the exhibit became part of the perceived need to reassert the call for tolerance.

Those who protested against the museum's actions asserted the "artistic" and "cultural" nature of the art. The federal Minister of Heritage noted that "A curator curates objects for an exhibition from an artistic perspective and I think that's the only prism through which we should be looking" (Leblanc 2001a:A10). This prism, I propose, constrains the efficacy of art and denies the inherent integrity of art and politics. Salloum noted that, "this type of show is needed more than ever. What my [video]tape could do is expand our understanding of how foreign policy affects those who face it on a daily basis" (Fraser and Palmer 2001:A12).

At the opening ceremonies of the exhibit, the Minister of Heritage represented the Canadian government. The Minister began and ended her speech with a "Shalom," a Hebrew greeting. I stood near the back of the very large hall, amongst friends and some several thousand guests. Friends concurred with me that it would probably highly unlikely that the Minister ends her speeches to Jewish Canadian groups with "Salam alekoun," the Arabic equivalent to "Shalom." But, more to the point, in the context of

the manufacturing of controversy around the exhibit, the Minister's semantic pluralism seemed to invoke a common framework in which things Arab need to be measured in terms of whether they are 'acceptable' to the presumed 'other side.'

Protests:

A letter written by two artists and a writer involved in the exhibit circulated internationally in a very short time and served to generate hundreds of other letters of protest that were sent to the museum. The letter stated, in part, that the context the museum wished to provide in light of anti-Arab sentiment following the attacks in the U.S. on September 11th "actually encourages such sentiment by anticipating a racist response from the audience" ("Culture wars" 2001:A15).

The artists' tact, though, was decidedly and intentionally liberal. They purposefully emphasised the value of the art on the basis of its non-political nature, rather than, for example, its critical, transformative, or subversive potential. Their letter did not risk confronting the museum on a more complex level that may have, for example, created an audience for, and a discourse on, art as a means of challenging or dismantling regimes of thought and politics. This was a conscious tactic on the part of the artists, their goal being to attain the broadest possible public support. Boundaries between art and politics were rhetorically invoked in their letter, as were boundaries between communities—'Arab,' and 'Canadian'.

Laura Marks, one of the authors of the letter, noted in a separate statement that, "I don't

want to say, 'Don't worry everybody, everything is fine because it's not political.' At the bottom, all art is political. But I do think this is work that is teaching, generous and beautiful and would help with intercultural understanding at a time when we need it" (Gessell 2001d:A6). The artists' response also underlined the teaching role of the museum through which 'political' aspects of the works could be transformed into education and understanding. The postponement, note the artists, undermines the museum's "important educational and humanitarian role" ("Culture wars" 2001:A15).

The use of strategic essentialism is by no means reactionary, though. The artists' protest played a significant role in generating pressure on the museum to reverse its decision. Moreover, as Shohat and Stam argue, "to suggest that essentialism is always and everywhere reactionary is indirectly to buy into essentialism, to 'act as if essentialism has an essence'" (Shohat and Stam 1994:346). Stuart Hall refers to the fictional necessity of arbitrary closure, and Said to strategic identity. These are, as Shohat and Stam correctly argue, "crucial for any multicultural struggle that hopes to allow for communities of identification, even if those communities are multiple, discontinuous, and partly imaginary" (Shohat and Stam 1994:346).

The result is a paradoxical situation whereby art potentially deconstructs totalising myths through aesthetic vocabularies while activism nourishes them because of the strategic necessity of creating and protecting spaces of identity, belonging, and community. In any event, the artists felt unjustly targeted by virtue of their Arab identity by the very institution that had taken on the role of 'celebrating' it. Nonetheless (or, perhaps as a result of this contradiction), not all the artists wished to take a public stand

in protest of the museum's actions. Some were concerned about how any protest on their part would be represented in the media and wanted the "activist artists" amongst them to tone down their protest of the museum's actions. Still others feared the museum's goal was to cancel the exhibit altogether.⁸¹

Rawi Hage, a Montreal-based artist of Lebanese origin, suggested the museum is "afraid of associating [itself] with the word Arab. That word is becoming such a scarecrow now... To consider me or my message [based] on some exterior event, means in a sense you're revising your view of me. I'm not normal any more" (Conlogue 2001b:A5).

Sami Zubi, a Palestinian-Canadian artist noted that "the message [from the museum] is that we are Canadians in a way, but that is suspended until the terrorism issue is resolved. We are not part of society until further notice" (Harris 2001a:23).

The museum's actions had an effect on at least one artist's creative decisions. Bernice Lutfie-Sorge, born in Canada, contemplated whether she should start to censor her images planned for another show elsewhere that was to run consecutively with the CMC exhibit. Once the museum backtracked and decided to go ahead, some of the artists contemplated whether or not they wanted their works included. None of the artists decided to remove their work from the exhibit.

⁸¹ Personal interview, 1 November 2001.

Representations:

But I am the exile.
Seal me with your eyes.
--Mahmoud Darwish

Media can “normalise as well as exoticise other cultures,” with media spectatorship forming “a dialog between texts, readers and communities existing in clear discursive and social relation to one another” (Shohat and Stam 1994:347). Media coverage across the country began to report the play-by-play of museum actions, official responses and pressure, and artists' protests. A significant amount (though not all) of front-page newspaper coverage questioned the wisdom or motives of the museum. Writers also took the museum to task for making Arab Canadians feel like they are not part of the Canadian national collective. Nonetheless, reporting tended to intensify the association of controversy with the exhibit, with some reporters taking it upon themselves to travel to Ottawa to verify whether or not the art was controversial.⁸²

The museum did not explicitly state that the problem with the works was their ‘political’ nature. Nonetheless, the discourse which arose in the media concerning the museum’s stated desire to postpone the exhibit revolved around the question of whether the works were ‘political’ or whether, on the other hand, they served the cause of intercultural understanding. An either-or framework served to reinforce the notion that the works of art were objects that needed to be scrutinised for their controversial nature or proven to be innocent. Articles that defended the works of art and the artists, and reassured readers

⁸² The following analysis draws on my review of over two hundred newspaper articles Canadian newspaper articles, including editorials, letters to editors, opinion pieces, and wire sources between 25 September and 22 October 2001. Media transcripts of radio coverage from the same period were also examined.

that the works were “just” folk, immigrant, or cultural art. The few articles that attempted to deconstruct the museum as a national institution and the motivations of its present and past directors, stopped short of presenting an analysis of the art works in their own right, for example, in relation to the artists’ bodies of work or with reference to forms and languages of art and identity.

Media coverage of the exhibit was most concentrated during the four-week period between the museum’s initial indication that it would postpone the exhibit and the few days following the opening of the exhibit. During this time, three phases of media coverage can be identified. The first reported on the museum’s intention to delay the exhibit and the protestations from the public, the featured artists, and government. During the second phase, articles reported on the museum’s reversal of its decision. A third lot of articles appeared two days prior to the opening of the exhibit, when the president of the CMC noted to a journalist that one of the pieces to be included gave him “concern.”

In the first group of articles, artists’ views were noted and the museum was taken to task. Editorials, typically, questioned whether the museum’s actions undermine Canada’s “commitment to multiculturalism,” raising “the question of whether multiculturalism in this country includes all cultures” (“Museum peace” 2001:A14). The second phase of coverage began two days before the opening of *Lands Within Me*, with a report citing the museum president’s “concern” about a particular piece of work to be included in the exhibit. The work was Salloum’s installation piece, described above. The president noted that “one image, a video of a Palestinian prisoner in an

Israeli jail, concerned us. It seemed to disseminate aggressive anger” (Conlogue 2001a:R3). A moral discourse was maintained in the article in which the museum must guard against the possibility that art by an Arab artist might “fan the flames of intolerance” (Conlogue 2001a:R3).

The video of the ‘prisoner,’ Soha Bechara, in fact takes place in Bechara’s Paris university dorm room. The journalist had no way of verifying for himself whether the piece of work referred to was likely to “disseminate aggressive anger.” The media did have access to “knowledgeable sources” that relayed to them that “the video includes the image of an airliner, and a call for all Arabs to unite and resist” (Fraser and Palmer 2001:A12). The artist was contacted by journalists and asked to verify this. Salloum explained that an image of an aeroplane was on one videotape and related to ideas of movement and transition, while on another video there was talk of the experience of resistance. Salloum noted “you’d have to stretch your imagination to make the connection” (Fraser and Palmer 2001:A12). Despite the fact that the journalists did not have access to the works in the exhibit, the headline of their article reads: “Video exhibit decries U.S., Israel” (Fraser and Palmer 2001:A12).

Editorials extolling the virtues of the (as yet unseen exhibit) defended it on the basis that it was not “part of some wider polemic” but, rather, “cultural in intent,” comprising mostly of ceramics, jewellery and calligraphy, and “reflecting the theme of ‘here and there’ common to all Canadian immigrant communities” (“Museum” 2001:A14). Even when journalists took the museum to task for refusing to let them see the offending work of art, they surmised that it might not be surprising “that some parts of the exhibit

might reflect an Arab *view* that they have been driven from their land” (Winsor 2001a:A13; emphasis added).

The third lot of articles began with the opening of the exhibit. These articles focused overwhelmingly on Salloum’s video installation and on one or two individuals and groups who thought that his work “has no place in a Canadian exhibition.” One individual wondered about the Canadianness of Salloum’s work, asking: “What does an expatriate Lebanese living in Paris have to do with the Canadian-Arab experience?” (Allan 2002:165). It was reported that those interviewed in Salloum’s work were making “unsubstantiated claims.” Another report quoted a Rabbi who declared that: “If they’re going to trumpet the Arab experience in Canada, that’s terrific, but (the Salloum installation) is inimical with the Canadian approach, which involves saying what’s good about you, not what’s bad about others” (Fraser 2001). Clearly, the transnational and transcultural nature of art and identity could not be accommodated within these perceptions of “the Canadian approach.”

While the museum backtracked in its attempt to postpone the exhibit, the exhibit became ‘known’ through particular discourses of art, culture, politics and identity. A discourse arose in which the works needed to be assessed on the basis of the use value of “cultural understanding” and a narrowly defined “multiculturalism.” One artist wondered, “Do we have to participate in the cultural education of everyone who goes to see a cultural exhibition” (Leblanc 2001b)?

Newspaper articles were located mostly in ‘news’ sections rather than in sections on art and culture. By side-stepping consideration of the art in terms of languages and forms of art, media coverage relied on notions of realism. The question of whether “context” was needed implied that ‘art’ ought to be subsumed below ‘realism.’ Bal, notes that realism is deceptive, serving as “a mode of interpretation that neglects the content of a representation in favor of the notion that ‘this is reality’ as an implication of the notion that ‘this is art’” (Bal 1996:8).

Ultimately, things “Arab” were assessed (positively or negatively) in terms of their acceptability to the wider “Canadian” project—itsself rewritten by the confluence of threats and fears that were generated by the “September 11” attacks south of the (newly contentious) Canadian border. On the other hand, the works themselves provide for endless possibilities of interpretation, signification, and subjective experience—and enable, in effect, a continual reverberation and transformation of wider contexts. The challenge is to read art outside of frameworks that either presume the separation of art and politics or conflate the two.

4.4 Conclusion: The *métissage* of art, belongings and relations of power

Exhibits engage, define, and constitute boundaries of identity and community. The CMC, like other contemporary national museums, continues to play a potent role in power structures because it is recruited by the state in nation building as well as by ‘local’ communities in their efforts to consolidate or shape their place in the national

collectivity.

At stake in constructions of group or community identity are the geopolitics that enable interpolations into discourses and relations of power. As mentioned above, exhibition strategies that account for the political as well as cultural roles of the museum would be better placed to foster viewing spaces that engage works of art as simultaneously part of cultural and political projects. In such strategies, the relations of power underpinning the CMC would be grappled with in an overt way within exhibitions. The Museum would need to take up the challenge of contextualising *itself* as emanating, for example, from histories of dominance and resistance. Only then will the full potential of artists' works and the full scope of their works be able to be incorporated into mutual social and political processes.

This would expand the range of things that typically happen in museums and museum-like settings (Clifford 1997:214). Currently, the range of things taken up by the CMC appears to have narrowed. Notably, the exhibit was not sent on its planned cross-Canada and international tours following its 18-month run at the CMC. Renewed activism, much of it internet-based, arose near the end of the exhibition run which noted that the curator had been informed by the Museum administration following the opening of *Lands Within Me* that her contract would not be renewed upon its completion. Protest letters sent to the museum from members of the public and arts community charged that the museum was continuing to assume the art works are somehow not acceptable. In this new protest, the Canadian government has not stepped in to attempt to influence the

museum's decisions. Further, the museum has taken steps to close down its Asia/Middle East division altogether.

Nonetheless, in the terrain of struggle in which the exhibit was situated, the Arab community felt like it too could make demands and call for representation within the Canadian lexicon. What needs to be born in mind, however, is that it is the multiplicity, discontinuity, and imaginary aspects of community, and its strategic constructions, that are important to processes of identity (Shohat and Stam 1994:346). The following chapter moves away from the more overt institutional processes and focuses on embodied enactments of memory and identity through musical and dance performances.

CHAPTER FIVE

ELABORATIONS OF IDENTITY AND BELONGING THROUGH MUSICAL AND DANCE PERFORMANCE

Music is our witness, and our ally. The beat is the confession
which recognizes, changes and conquers time. Then, history
becomes a garment we can wear and share, and not a cloak in
which to hide; and time becomes a friend.

--James Baldwin⁸³

This chapter continues the thesis that artistic expression is an important realm within and through which processes of identity, subjectivities, and social relations are negotiated and enacted. The chapter focuses on ways in which the meanings that performances of music engender create spaces for new subject positions and remembering to various places of identity and communities of belonging. I explore how musical performance create and deploy cultural knowledges and deploy these within and across various audiences.

Although music is temporally situated, unlike exhibitions of visual art that can be visited repeatedly, musical performances are deeply embedded in cultural, historical time, and in the localization of space. For example, the emotional spaces that music creates are powerful “precisely because they overlap and interweave with the social, the political, and the economic” (Smith 2000:632). Musical performance creates meanings in a confluence of multiple processes on various scales. In so doing, a web of relationships between listeners and spectators is created. Indeed, Stokes posits that

⁸³ Quoted in Gilroy (1993a:120).

musical performance organizes collective memories and contemporary experiences of place “with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity” (Stokes 1997:3).

I examine in this chapter ways in which the performance styles and strategies of three musicals serve to deploy inter- as well as intra-cultural boundaries of identity. One of these musicians is also a dancer. The music they perform includes Palestinian ‘intifada songs,’ contemporary jazz tunes, Western pop music, and a traditional musical form derived from Sufi devotional love poetry popular in 13th century Moorish Spain. The three musicians construct and contest identity boundaries through their respective choice of performance styles and strategies. The musicians’ performances, like their lives, are transnational and transcultural. Their performances involve constructions and contestations of notions of place, authenticity, and communal identity. The result, I argue, is the elaboration of terrains of belonging. These terrains are multi-local, strategic, embodied, and transformative.

The first part of the chapter looks at conceptualizations of music that inform the research. In the second section, the artists’ biographical and musical trajectories are outlined. Thirdly, I explore the artists’ performance styles and strategies, and ways these engender new subjectivities for artists and audience members. The chapter draws heavily on interviews I conducted with the musicians. My observations as a member of audiences and discussions with members of various audiences also inform my analysis.

5.1 Music and dance performance as embodied, transcultural strategies

Music ‘operates’ at several scales, from the listener’s body to the social categories that are engaged in its performance. Moreover, music plays an important role in the numerous ways in which we relocate ourselves (Stokes 1997:3). In this regard, both musical performances and dance, I argue, enact cultural memory to create, contest, or subvert boundaries of identity.

With questions of identity having moved away from notions of essentialism and toward concerns with the construction, maintenance and negotiation of boundaries of identity, so the concern with music has moved away from searching for authentic aspects of identity *in* music. More interesting and important are questions of “how music is used by social actors in specific local situations to erect boundaries, to maintain distinctions between us and them, and how terms such as ‘authenticity’ are used to justify these boundaries” (Stokes 1997:6).

Music making involves a power to mobilise audiences, and assert, adopt, contest, and negotiate models of social organization (Smith 2000:617). It is increasingly understood that relations of power are involved in all musical production and performance. Indeed, intense power struggles infuse the performance of music, and music has informed various political projects on the left (Stokes 1997:16; Revill 2000:599, 601). Music can be a tool for the creation and consolidation of boundaries of identity (Attali 1985:6; cited in Revill 2000:599). In Said’s terms, music participates in the elaboration of

society in that it is involved in the differentiating of social space through, for example, national anthems, marches, and the close association of music with the church and with notions of heritage and folklore (Said 1991a:xix). Geographies, histories, and identities, then, are forged in the production, performance, and listening of music (Smith 2000:621).

The power of music is also its allusiveness. Music communicates what cannot be spoken. This sensory source of knowledge that music represents has implications in understanding what is contested or negotiated in performances by artists from cultures and regimes of knowledge that are outside of the dominant (American/European) cultures. The music and dance performances I engage with in this chapter are by artists whose lives and creative productions (like those of the artists featured in Chapters Three and Four) are marked by their movement between two or more cultures. As Marks articulates,

People whose lives are built in the movement between two or more cultures are necessarily in the process of transformation. The expression of this experience is impossible not only within hegemonic discourse, but also within any single cultural regime of knowledge (Marks 2000:65).

The musical performance and dance by the three artists examined below serve to create audiences and modes of thought that can, also, ‘travel’ between cultures and regimes of knowledge. The embodiment of music and dance performing and listening represents a vital aspect of the relocating and repositioning of the self—and, by extension, of the contexts and regimes of knowledge through which the performances take place. Marks, again, suggests that,

Embodied memories and experiences may well be some of the most important registers of global shifts in power and the emergence of new subjectivities (Marks 2000:200).

The exploratory research below would indicate that the performance and dance by the three artists reflect strategic deployments as well as ‘retreats’ of identities and regimes of knowledge, through inflections, movements, styles, and strategies of performances.

5.2 Performance spaces and embodied histories

The three artists⁸⁴ were born of parents who lived in historic Palestine until 1948, when they fled as refugees. The musicians were born in Palestinian diasporas in the Arab world (two in Beirut, one in Kuwait). They each sing and compose music and lyrics, and one incorporates dance into her band’s performances. Unlike the painters examined in Chapter Three, who span three generations, the musicians are all of the same generation and are in their 30s. Notably, they arrived in Canada at different stages of their lives. Nicolas is a recent migrant to Canada whose passion for communication through music is rooted in the charged context of Palestinian nationalism and civil war in Lebanon. Camilla came to Canada at the age of fifteen. She spent her childhood in the Arab world but ensconced in an English speaking educational enclave. The third, Rania, has been in Canada since the age of five. Rania spent most of her life and all of her remembered life in Canada. In her performances, she draws on her urban, Torontonians cultural context.

⁸⁴ These interviews were conducted between March and September of 1999, in Montreal, Ottawa, and Wakefield, Quebec, in the musicians’ homes, studios, or near places of performance. They were loosely structured in order to draw out the musicians’ own narratives

Performance involves actively creating, negotiating, and maintaining cultural knowledge. My treatment of the artists' performances strives to stay close to the spaces of performance and the narratives of the musicians and members of the audience. The artists are looked at in turn, but the following sketches are, necessarily, not symmetrical. Each artist's performances and, indeed, each performance takes place within particular confluences of artistic, social, and cultural imperatives. In the discussion below, there is somewhat greater focus on Nicolas' music and performances. As will become more apparent, the discussion of Nicolas' musical form and performances serve to elaborate ways in which cultural and political strategies 'feed into' each other. The performance strategies adopted by Camilla, and the music and dance by Rania suggest different navigations. Camilla's artistic decisions highlight ways in which artistic strategies shape locales of cultural expression and can serve to reproduce silences. Perhaps the most embodied form of performance is dance. The confluence of gender and collective identity markers is particularly apparent in Rania's dance performance. The following discussion summarizes each performer's biographical and artistic background as a way of better understanding their artistic expressions and choices.

Nicolas was born and raised in Beirut. His family is from Nazareth and fled there in 1948. Nicolas left Lebanon in his teens to study music in Athens and Moscow, and returned to live and work as a musician in Beirut during the civil war in Lebanon. Both his music and his identity were shaped by within a highly charged context of civil war in Lebanon. Nicolas, like the other artists examined in this thesis, lives multiple exiles.

and links between their work, their identifications and aspirations. The names I use here for the musicians are pseudonyms.

He is removed in multiple ways from the environments of memory that underlie his identification as Palestinian. Nicolas was exiled in Lebanon as a Palestinian refugee. Because of his activism he is unable to return to Lebanon. Nicolas emigrated to Montreal in 1994, and four years later moved to Ottawa. In Canada, he is removed from his Arabic culture, language, and communities. He also felt exiled from his Palestinian identity at the time of the signing of the Oslo agreements.⁸⁵ These various exiles have come into play in the form and style of his music

Camilla was also born in Beirut, but grew up in Saudi Arabia, and moved with her family to Canada when she was 15. She lives in Montreal. Camilla initially trained and excelled as a classical pianist, but decided to “branch out” into other forms of music. She now plays guitar and is the singer in a four-piece band that is producing their first demo-tape. Although she grew up in the Arab world, Camilla went to English-speaking British schools and felt disengaged from her culture and Palestinian identity. She does not read Arabic or listen to Arabic music and was, in her words, “totally caught in the middle” between Arabic and Western cultural contexts. She describes: “My parents lost their homes, their homeland... this forms who I am. My identity has also been shaped by being non-Saudi and non-Muslim.” She is now consciously exploring her Palestinian cultural heritage by seeking out English translations of Palestinian poetry.

⁸⁵ Like other Palestinian refugees, the fate of (approximately) 200,000 Palestinians in Lebanon, living in very cramped refugee camps with no political and very few civil rights, was not decided by the agreement, but left to be addressed in future negotiations. Moreover, the Oslo agreement and its various successor agreements mention UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 as the basis of negotiations, but nonetheless preconditioned the attainment of Palestinian national aspirations (to self determination and return of refugees to their homes) to the outcome of negotiations between Israel, the vastly more powerful, and occupying, power, and Palestinians, who remain subject to Israeli military occupation. The alienation felt by those who opposed the agreements was increased by the fact that there was little or no discursive

Rania was born in Kuwait and, after the accidental death of her father when she was one month old, she and her mother went to live in Amman, Jordan. When she was five years old, she moved with her mother, aunt and grandmother to Toronto. After a personally difficult time in her 20s, she turned to dance and singing as a means of “grounding” herself. She had been living as a full-time artist for five years when I interviewed her. While she defines herself as a dancer, Rania sings in two bands. She also has a background in theatre film,⁸⁶ and teaches dance and music to adults and children.

5.3 Music and terrains of struggle

Nicolas:

Nicolas plays the *ud* and guitar, as well as the *bazouk*, an ancient instrument with one string. The *ud* is a plucked lute instrument often considered the most important melodic instrument throughout the Middle East. It is played in virtually all styles of music in the Middle East (Ladkani 2001:215). Nicolas composes his own music and writes lyrics that he sings in Arabic, accompanied by back up musicians. His music includes nationalist Palestinian songs, classical Arabic music, and Western influenced jazz pieces with no lyrics. Nicolas’ performances in Lebanon were marked by his identity as

space in which to express dissent to the agreement. In many media, those who opposed the agreements were perceived and portrayed as being “against peace.”

⁸⁶ Rania has appeared in several plays and in Canadian-Armenian filmmaker Atom Egoyan’s film “Calendar,” which I pleasantly discovered during a break in research.

Palestinian. He played ‘on the front lines’ of the Lebanese civil war, for a reconciliation between Palestinians and Lebanese, and for peace.⁸⁷

In moving from Beirut to Canada, the motivation behind his music shifted from singing for peace and the return of Palestinians to their homes, toward exposing Canadians and Americans to Arabic culture. He feels that too little is known of Arabic music in the West, and said, “maybe they will understand us more, through this music.” His motivation in Canada is a response to a cultural divide between North America and the Arab world. (This cultural divide is underlined by a border crossing experience he had. While travelling between Canada and the U.S., an American border official was surprised at his explanation that he was travelling to the U.S. to perform a concert and commented that he “didn’t know Arabs make music.”) Nicolas’ musical influences include Palestinian poetry. He plans a CD of songs with lyrics taken from English translations of poems by Mahmoud Darwish and Tawfiq Zayyad, perhaps the two most prominent Palestinian poets.

Countercultural strategies have involved subordinate groups’ attempts to use “music as a weapon which is able to penetrate walls and minds...” (Ballinger 195:23, quoted in Revill 2000:601-602). Similarly, Nicolas noted that through music, he will “go through their door, their wall” and have Western culture pay heed to his own. To attune audiences to Arabic music, he plays Arabic scales on Western instruments and Western scales on Arabic instruments. Depending on the location of his performances, Nicolas’ music becomes either a conduit of historical, Palestinian national memory or,

⁸⁷ This section draws on personal interviews conducted with Nicolas in Ottawa, 11 June and 7 July, 1999.

alternatively, a means of transmitting a more general knowledge of Arab culture to Western audiences.

For example, Nicolas stopped writing lyrics since the Oslo agreements were signed in 1993 between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government. Like many of his musician friends in Beirut, he stopped writing songs because he felt he had nothing to say. In fact, the changed context left him with no referents with which to create a musical identity and voice in the struggle. As a Palestinian in Lebanon, his fate was addressed only tangentially in the agreements, as the Palestinian refugee issue was left for future negotiations. He said:

Since 1980, we used to play music for a certain cause, for Palestine, for justice, for peace. But after Oslo... what are we going to say to the audience, to the people? That everything we were singing to you was a big lie? I used to write about Palestine, about returning to Palestine, about refugees, about home, about Communism, about international solidarity. Now, I'm unable to write any lyrics about these issues. There's no communism. There's no cause for us as Palestinians. We lost our cause... Songs and poems should talk about the future, not open up history... So instead I'm writing music...and everybody has to imagine the lyrics... we have nothing left to say...

The name of his forthcoming instrumental CD is "yarayar," an Arabic word meaning circles, and he explained that "you go around in circles and you don't reach anywhere". Nicolas' sense of despair regarding the 'Oslo' framework of the Palestinian struggle is accompanied by a poignant alienation he feels in Canada:

I'm hoping to write [lyrics] but I'm unable to feel... I believe this country took something from me from inside. I feel myself from inside very very cold... empty, without feelings... If you want to write something you have to feel it first of all, you have to live what you are writing... So I have in mind that if I want to sing again the audience will have to be non-Arabs. Non-Arabs have no idea about [Palestinian] history. Most of them don't have a clear idea.

The meaning and power of music is closely connected to its performance, perhaps more so than is the case for visual arts exhibits. This is partly because music unfolds in a temporal space. While an exhibit can be revisited, concert performances are marked in a more fleeting and therefore poignant space of time (Said 1991a:xix). Because of this, examining performance spaces can shed light on more subtle or nuanced ways in which art inhabits and constructs subjectivities.

Nicolas has played several concerts in Quebec, and won first prize at the Montreal Jazz Festival in 1995 in a competition between 30 countries. He recounted to me the context of this performance in Montreal. At the massively attended festival, a few performances before his own, a Jewish musician from Paris played a song by Said Darweish, a well known Egyptian musician who is considered the father of modern Arabic music.

Nicolas described the event in the following exchange:

Nicolas: She played the piece by Said Darweish and said that it's a Jewish traditional song. So I was shocked. I spoke with my friends, told them we have to do something. I said, "I'm going to play the same piece of music, we don't have to practice." We didn't practice. I wrote the notes in five minutes, then I told them "play the way you want to but what is important for me is to get the melody and I'm going to play the melody." I told the audience that I was very impressed because I'm playing with a Jewish musician in the same concert and her songs were very very beautiful. I said she played a song by Said Darweish, who died in 1923. Said Darweish ... bla bla. I told them who he was. So I started to play this piece with Oriental instruments. She used a guitar. We started to play with the *ud* and *bazouk*.

Mona: And it was the very same piece of music that she'd played?

Nicolas: Yes, the same piece. But because she's French, she couldn't sing the '*orab*', something the Arabs have in their throat because of the language. So the audience was shocked because of the [power of the] music itself.

Nicolas' assertion of cultural integrity and "his heritage" is an attempt to counter the denial of Palestinian identity. Nicolas' performance also created a convergence of

competing discourses of Palestinian and Jewish “peoplehood,” and public engagement in the “rivalry” of these discourses. At stake was the ability to engage the audience in the structures of feeling and modes of thought that underlie discourses of Palestinian identity.

The geopolitical conflict between Palestinians and Israel was played out through Nicolas’ performance. Nicolas attempted to assert cultural authenticity and derive the legitimation that is seen to emanate from it. Stokes points out that intense and complex power struggles underpin ‘multicultural’ events, transnational musical exchanges, and other ‘world music’ events (Stokes 1997:16). Music shapes and is shaped by the ways in which audiences listen. Listening involves “‘taking soundings,’ and about knowing the other exists” (Smith 2000:634). As Revill succinctly notes, “the capacity for sound to become a distinctive and powerful geographical force is closely related to its capacity for engaging and marshalling other practices and discourses” (Revill 2000:610). Indeed, before and after Nicolas’ performance, journalists attempted to have Nicolas and the Jewish musician shake hands for the cameras.⁸⁸

Audiences pick up different structures of feeling from performances. Said notes that, “a capacity of giving life to a piece *in* the performance [is]...dependent on knowing a composer through a structure of feeling that is apparent only when one goes through the detailed articulation of the work... [which relies on the] formalities, rules, structures, and styles” of music (Said 1991a:91). Nicolas’ performance required of the audience a listening that extended beyond the discrete boundaries of the piece of work itself or,

even, of the cultural context from which the work emanates. The audience was entreated to 'listen' also to the political struggle engaged by cultural expression.

Meaning rested on the ability and desire of audience members to 'read' the way in which Nicolas 'pitched' his performance of Said Darweish's piece. He did so in the last-minute decision to change his band's planned musical set, his pointed description of the historical and cultural context of the Darwish song performed by the previous musician, and his conscientious use of Arabic inflection in his singing. The potential of music to function as a bridge of cultural experience and, by extension, to effect identifications beyond the emotional is partly what is at stake for artists like Nicolas, whose artistic and political commitments are closely tied. Through his performance, Nicolas attempts to create a space for a Palestinian narrative of loss. He consciously uses his music as a means of interjecting a narrative that is outside of the dominant historical knowledge—not unlike the artists whose paintings are examined in Chapter Three.

Nicolas makes use of the fact that performance spaces exist in tandem with other or previous performance spaces (Said 1991a:70). The power of performance is also derived from the fact that the performance of a piece of music largely *creates* the meaning of the piece. Stokes aptly notes that,

Performance does not simply convey cultural messages already 'known.' On the contrary, it reorganises and manipulates everyday experiences of social reality, blurs, elides, ironises and sometimes subverts commonsense categories and markers. Above all, performance is a vital tool in the hands of performers themselves in socially acknowledged games of prestige and power (Stokes 1997:97).

⁸⁸ In the years following the signing of the Oslo and subsequent agreements, it was typical of the media to attempt to depict displays of *rapprochement* between Israeli and Palestinian

To Nicolas, asserting “his heritage” enabled a re-membering of his sense of belonging within the Palestinian lexicon. His impromptu decision was based on the perceived negation and usurpation of Palestinian cultural forms suffered at the hands of the Israeli state and, in this instance, the French Jewish singer. Bowman notes that, “in the absence of any generalizing positivity defining the Palestinians as a whole, the experience of antagonism itself comes to provide the determinative marker of identity” (Bowman 1994:146). The event also reinforced for him his sense of importance in ‘putting Palestine on the map’ of the consciousness of the West. Non-Arab audiences in the West are perceived by Nicolas as both having a gap in knowledge of Arabic culture as well as possessing political influence on their country’s foreign policy. His displacement, as a Palestinian refugee who was born and raised outside of his ‘homeland,’ and his location in Canada shape conditions and strategies of his exile.

Nicola used Arabic musical instruments and vocalizations both to distinguish his performance from that of the French performer, as well as to reclaim and replace the piece within its ‘rightful’ cultural context. His defence of his culture was waged not against the ravages of time and lapsed memory, or (solely) against cultural appropriation. His musical elaboration of the piece and, by extension, of “his heritage,” enacted a struggle against the violence of cultural erasure and political decimation that this signifies. His effort, more than “dragooning music into cultural service” (Said 1991a:56-57), served to extend the terrain of Palestinian national narrative. Not unlike Palestinian painters illustrating literary scenes as allegories of the Palestinian plight, Nicolas joins structures of feeling created through music with narratives of identity.

counterparts of any public event.

Although Nicolas notes that “music cannot be political,” performance contexts render them aesthetic, social (including political), embodied, and emotive expressions. His performances transform the ‘Canadian’ context by effecting new terms of the debate. While Nicolas’ musical ‘mission’ in Canada is clear to him, his sense of alienation remains. Nicolas draws on his memories of people and place in the production of his work to fashion a creative and emotional space in Canada:

For [composing] music, I’m depending now on my imagination, what happened, what I used to do, what I saw, the people I used to know, the people I love and am unable to see again.

One particularly moving song Nicolas played for me was composed to express his mother’s labour and birth of him. The piece is instrumental, and, as I listened to it with Nicolas, he movingly narrated the story of his relationship to his mother, with different segments of the song corresponding to his mother’s labour, his birth, childhood and adolescence. The piece was composed in Canada, and it seemed to represent—and create—a rebirth of himself on Canadian soil.

Camilla:

Although she grew up in the Arab world, Camilla lacks the cultural continuity that is Nicolas’ by virtue of his education and musical career in Lebanon. Camilla’s education in Saudi Arabia, as mentioned, was in English, and has resulted in her sense of alienation from the Arabic language and cultural context. In Canada, she finds herself defined as not ‘really’ Arabic. She explains:

I found my friends felt I wasn't really Arabic as I don't speak Arabic. I understand everything that is spoken to me but I respond in English and don't listen to Arabic music. Hence, to some of them, how could I be Arabic?

Not able to read Arabic properly, she searched the Middle East Bookstore in Montreal for English language works and discovered the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish translated into English. She is now composing music for lyrics derived from English translations of several of Darwish's poems, and hopes to reach the younger North American Arab public. Her strategy is very different from that of Nicolas. She laments that:

When I play for a generic audience, I feel I can't be too Arabic. I thought about changing my name so it wouldn't be so Arabic, and may still, but someone said that "ethnic is in." ...It's hard to find a way of gaining credibility.⁸⁹

This bind is reflected in the way Camilla orders her musical production, which comprises two distinct groups of songs and two sets of audiences. There are songs she writes herself and performs with her four-member band. The lyrics to these allude only vaguely to the Palestinian cause. Then, she performs songs with lyrics from English translations of poetry by Mahmoud Darwish, which she plays only at gatherings comprised of mostly Arab audience members. At general student venues she plays songs from the first group.

From my vantage in the audience of some of her performances, I sensed that the contradiction embedded in this division in her work affected her performance style and energy. Singing the latter, more political songs, she seemed to very powerfully capture audiences. When I queried her ambivalence about performing the more political yet more moving pieces, she replied that, "Among Arabs there is a major fear that if anyone comes out and speaks they will be cut down. I don't want to be silenced before I

can speak.” She will “eventually work in a Middle Eastern influence” into her more “radio friendly” songs but has not yet decided how she will do this. She is keeping her more passionate performances and songs under wraps, so to speak. But, her more “radio-friendly” songs may not have the raw energy and passion in them to create the career she aspires to (something akin to that of Canadian singer, Alanis Morissette). When I suggested as much to her, she relayed that she is “chameleon-like” with her music, adapting it to her environment, “because that is what my life has been like. No real place is home.”

Her chameleon approach is deployed strategically. One of Camilla’s two main corporate sponsors stopped its support following a concert that was preceded by a screening of a BBC produced film of Said’s return visit to his homeland. Shortly thereafter, Camilla expressed her resignation that she would subvert her “voice” to the proclivities of the music industry:

I feel now I will have to find a way of distancing myself from the Palestinian cause and from identifying as Palestinian, which hurts me. The reason is financial, the sponsors, the business of music. The people who will be able to take my voice and put it out there have the general public to contend with.

Said’s words are again brought to mind: “the ‘what’ and ‘how’ in the representation of ‘things,’ while allowing for considerable individual freedom, are circumscribed and socially regulated” (Said 1993: 80). She is still planning a CD of songs from Mahmoud Darwish poems but, because of the perceived career costs, she intends to produce it under an assumed name. Camilla’s decisions and artistic production reflect the ongoing

⁸⁹ This section draws on a personal interview and telephone conversations with Camilla in Montreal, 12 March, 1999 and 7-20 February, 1999.

negotiation of social regulation through her own subjectivity, identity, and performances.

Rania:

Issues of language and authenticity arise in particular ways in Rania's music and dance performances. They involve boundaries of Arab identity and artistic form. Rania's performances provide insight into ways that difference is inflected through the body in performance. Rania is committed to performing music that revives and celebrates Arabic culture. She sings in an 11-piece band based in Toronto that has performed across the country, playing Greek, Arabic, and other music from various parts of the world. Performances are very lively and expressive of a mixing of local Toronto inflections with a studied devotion to various classical styles. Rania is also a member of a three-piece band with which she sings, plays several instruments, and performs dance pieces. This band performs Mowashahat music, which consists of Sufi devotional poetry put to music. The style first appeared in Egypt and Iraq as early as the 9th century, but was developed in Andalusia around the 12th and 13th century. The musical form precipitated a movement away from the old Arabic poetic forms and meters and toward new ones designed to be set to music. A revival of the style occurred in Aleppo in the 19th century, and it continues to be performed in parts of North Africa.

Rania, along with the band's other singer, trained in Toronto, Egypt, and Aleppo, Syria, and is amongst a handful of musicians around the world who have begun to revive the Mowashahat form. The band's performances are passionate and, in my observation, have a kind of mesmerising effect on audiences. What is also remarkable is a striking

playfulness interjected between and throughout pieces, which are performed with apparent love and devotion on the part of the band members. This devotion to the music is connected also to Rania's sense of the importance of the music to those who are 'more Arab' than she or her band members feel they are.⁹⁰

Rania and other members of her band sing in Arabic, each having come to the language late in life. She is very conscious of the musicality inherent in the language itself and of the moving effect of the music. But, as an urban, English speaking Torontonion, she feels removed from knowing precisely how the experience of hearing Arabic singing affects Arabic-speaking audiences. She says,

All you have is a sense that there's importance here and you may not even know what it is in terms of how it emanates and affects the audiences or the people who come into contact with what you do. But you just have to follow the feeling that this matters, and that it is a gift from history that's come to you and that you have to honour it in how you present it within the context of who you are and your life and what's available to you.

Singing in Arabic both connects Rania and her band to their Arabic-speaking audiences, and differentiates them. She notes, Arab audiences "notice where we excel with the language and where we're deficient in the language." That is, the band's renditions reflect both a reverence for the musical tradition as well as a desire to graft it onto their equally 'indigenous' Torontonion cultural identity and its urban settings. She explains:

We are in a position to take traditions associated with our cultural heritage and bring them across the borders that we've traveled across and I feel we are able to do that because we are so *here* and I feel like our taste artistically, our humour, our irony, all these things that develop from being downtown Torontonion people give us a perspective even in terms of making music more modern or bringing it across to the West...being able to 'send up' where you

⁹⁰ This section quotes heavily from an interview conducted with Rania in Wakefield, Quebec, 11 April, 1999.

come from but lovingly, or being able to celebrate and laugh at where you are because you're also there and you love it.

As Stokes correctly notes, music is socially meaningful “not entirely, but largely because it provides means by which people recognise identities and places, and the boundaries which separate them” (Stokes 1997:5). The boundaries that are created through the Rania’s band’s performances are inflected with local sensibilities so they can be traversed by the performers as well as by different audiences. Dance represents still more embodied traversings of boundaries—by both artist and audience members.

During the second of two sets of music performed by the band, Rania performs an Eastern dance, or bellydance, as it is known in the West. From my perspective in the audience of a performance in a small town in Quebec, Rania’s dance seemed to take some people by surprise.⁹¹ As I watched Rania, I was also uncomfortably conscious of Hollywood images of Arab bellydancers. I assumed that the audience too was viewing her dance through a similarly projected “veil” of Hollywood stereotypes, but realised that was not necessarily the case. A friend I sat with, who grew up in Canada and is of Egyptian origin was making a concerted study of Rania’s hand and foot movements, and declared to me that her performance was “not authentic.” As Stokes notes, regarding music, “a sense of identity can be put into play through music by performing it, dancing to it, listening to it or even thinking about it (Stokes 1997:24). Similarly, both the performing and the watching of dance serves to mobilise boundaries.

⁹¹ The venue is the Black Sheep Inn (or *le mouton noire*) in Wakefield, a town in rural Quebec, north of Ottawa. The audience consisted of local artists, professional Anglophones who live in town and commute to work in Ottawa or Hull, local rural and working-class people, as well as, typically for the venue, a good number of people who drove up from Ottawa.

My friend's comments represented also a kind of social regulation, which I 'passed on' to Rania during my interview with her at the end of the evening. Rania defended her performance, noting that:

Oriental dance, the "belly-dance" is a hybrid form. It's borrowed...It's definitely got Indo-Persian influence and African influence and other influences and my aesthetic is very influenced by court dance traditions and Indian dances and I know that. But I don't feel that it makes it less authentic. I feel that it's personal and also very connected to the music. Also, I study with the "authentic" people of belly dance as much as I can and I feel what stays with me and what comes out of me, especially when I improvise is what's supposed to be there and what doesn't seem to latch onto my soul as part of my personal aesthetic, other people can do it.

Said notes that most of the bellydancers in the West seem to be non-Arab. There are Russians, Americans, Ukrainians, Armenians, and French performing the dance (Said 1999a). Rania's performances, because she is perceived as embodying Arabic culture, are sometimes invested with the perceived need to maintain boundaries of class and community. Rania recounts one woman's reaction to her dance performance and the perceived need to keep it in a reputable space:

I got this fantastic phone call from this Lebanese woman who told me a thousand times, "Rania whatever you are doing I don't know what you are doing but it's high art. You have to take this seriously, you must never do it where people are eating and drinking!" Maybe the bottom line was "don't do it in the night clubs" or something.

Performances of Arabic music in Canada are important means by which Arab Canadians constitute themselves as a community. Moreover, Aiwa Ong and Michael Peletz suggest that,

Discursive constructions of bodies are frequently plotted against divisions that maintain social order, and that women's bodies in particular are commonly used to symbolise and threaten transgressions of social boundaries (quoted in Fortier 1999:57).

Anne-Marie Fortier suggests, further, that “the performativity of gender is not only most intensive, but perhaps most imperative at the borders of communities, classes, nationalities and cultures” (Fortier 1999:57). Rania’s performance invokes gender and class boundaries in the ‘service’ of boundaries of communal Arab identity.

Said suggests that bellydance (at least some performances of it, for example, those by legendary Egyptian bellydancer Tahia Carioca) is untranslatable and part of the “closed off areas” of Arab culture. Rania attempts to articulate something akin to Said’s notion. Her comment, below, alludes to differences she perceives and creates between her own dance and identity and “other” parts of Arab cultural expression.

Rania: Dance is a whole other mysterious thing in Arabic culture, how this icon of the dancer has survived and it’s just incredible, and there’s such a love-hate relationship with it.

Mona: Do you have a love-hate relationship with it yourself?

Rania: I do, for sure. I feel that in myself... If I see a wonderful, beautiful woman who’s got all this wonderful freedom and control in her body and who goes up and starts popping her boobs in some guy’s face who’s drinking Johnny Walker Red or something, I don’t care if what she’s doing is harder than anyone in the room can do, for me I literally feel like I could start crying because it bothers me. And yet I kind of don’t judge it because you know maybe this woman can handle that and for her it’s celebratory. For me it bugs me. I can’t go there. So I don’t know, it’s hard....I mean there is tremendous passion and sensuality and tremendous cultural multiple personality going on among the Arabs. So women who come out and slap it on the table are saying part of the truth.

The role of women as reproducers of boundaries of ethnic and national groups (Walby, 1996; Nash, 1994; Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989), and as delineators of difference between ‘East’ and ‘West’ (Ahmed, 1982; Kabbani, 1986), renders Rania’s performances potent spaces of cultural signification and difference--between and within ‘Arab’ and ‘Canadian’ audiences. At the same time, Rania is primarily concerned with seeking her own way within the traditional forms of music and dance. Her performance

enables her to ‘travel’ between and through the universality of artistic appeal, the symbolic power of representations, and the specificity of her own renditions on the (ever evolving) forms of dance and music.

The issue of authenticity also arises with regard to Rania’s self-identification. She says, of her Palestinianness,

I have a lot of strong emotions about it... and I feel an empathy for my family who is there and the people who are there but I feel like I’m such a diluted version of that struggle... I can’t begin to appreciate what it was like to live through the Intifada. I haven’t made a big sweeping Palestinian statement in my art yet, and maybe I will in a way some day. I don’t know how yet exactly... I hope to find some way of expressing my Palestinianness in a way that’s celebratory and humanising and not just about presenting the political struggle... It’s always with me, though, I definitely feel that.

For Rania, emotional connection remains a powerful avenue through which to engage audiences with regard to apparently wider “humanising experiences.”

The context in Canada is contradictory: Sounds and rhythms of Arabic music are increasingly less alien to the Western ear. The “World Music” phenomenon has resulted in a proliferation of music (and markets) that mix cultural influences in musical compositions. At the same time, Arabic music is “gutted” of its cultural or contextual meaning (Swedenberg 1999). Swedenberg argues that “Arab World Music” is being marketed and consumed in such a way that an audience is being created for the sounds of the music at the expense of the cultural or contextual meaning behind the music. Indeed, it is used in odd spots in film soundtracks, providing the aural backdrop as the space battle scene is set at the start of the American-made film, *The Fifth Element*. Swedenberg also notes that Mowashahat music is played during film scenes of terrorist attacks (Swedenberg 1999).

And, yet, there is a greater interest in bellydance in the West in recent years that can be at least partly attributed to the creation of audiences and interest generated by world music and the global music and art scene. Rania noted that,

We're starting to get a certain kind of recognition and a certain kind of respect. And you know "world music" or the global music scene certainly helps a lot. I think the last time there was a wave of interest in belly dance was the "kitsch" phenomenon in the '60s and '70s. Now I think it's grounded in something that is taken much more seriously.

While Rania forges Torontonion and Palestinian Arab identities through her music and dance, Camilla deliberately chooses a strategy that involves a silencing of her identity as Palestinian and Arab until such time in the future when she will have enough credibility to confront the fear of putting her voice 'out there.'⁹²

5.4 Conclusion: 'Unhomed geographies' of music and subject positions

Performances of music and dance articulate with such diverse processes as artistic invention, cultural memory, gender relations, audience significations and transnational political relations. The artists' works and performances attest to the unfixity of identity and the negotiated play of artistic form and context in any given performance. At the same time, the composition of the music, lyrics, and the social and cultural inflections within performance styles, give expression to and create subjective and cultural 'dwellings.'

⁹² Camilla eventually changed the spelling of her last name (from a 'familiar' Arab family name to one that has the same pronunciation but with the distinctly Irish—O'—at the start), to render

Nicolas consciously takes on the burden of memory in order to protect his heritage and to try to convey to audiences that Arab culture is more than just belly-dancers.

Alternatively, Rania works on the understanding that forms of artistic expression associated identified as part of a heritage are in fact always changing. Her dance, then, is a contribution to the evolving of forms. Rania pushes the boundaries of form and identity in her dance by reinfusing into the dance various cultural influences. In the process she recreates and re-members a cultural dynamism to her audiences. Rania “stays true” to the mixing of influences that comprise the dance form. She crosses cultural divides and renders the divides creatively and politically productive. She says of her music and dance performance: “I feel like this is a humanising experience and I feel like it is for the audience.”

The embodied practices of music and dance performance suggest a multiplicity of diaspora experiences and negotiations, and endless nuances of negotiation with and through boundaries of identity. The ‘play’ of meanings is the currency of performance. Through the body and cultural referents, performances of inter- and intra-cultural differences are created and contested. Music and dance performances nuance contests of identity and power. Certainly, music and dance are important registers of the strategies and constraints faced by individuals in regenerating, recreating, and re-membering themselves in diaspora spaces, aesthetics and politics.

it “more friendly” to promoters and audiences. These decisions reflect her perception of the receptivity to her Palestinian voice and identity in Canada.

Music provides a means, Said argues, of thinking through “the integral variety of human cultural practices” (Said 1991a:105). In this chapter I have tried to illustrate ways in which music and dance performances are means by which artists and audiences actively navigate cultural and political border crossings. The performances indicate a multiplicity of ways in which diaspora Palestinians craft and challenge identities. In doing so, they put into play silences, ironies, cultural knowledges, and embodied histories. Stokes notes that, “depending upon how we are placed by other social facts,” music can “put into play unexpected and expanding possibilities” (Stokes 1997:24). These unexpected and expanding possibilities are grasped in the exchange of performance and spectatorship. Performances enact embodied memory, personal histories, national narratives, transnational power relations, and ever new art forms. When bodies enter the performance and spectatorship of art, as they do in dance even more so than in music, the unscripted terrain of “humanising experiences” is created. The defamiliarization work that is the power of art creates belongings that are ‘unhomed geographies,’ to borrow Irit Rogoff’s notion (Rogoff 2000:4).

As such, “the perilous territory of not-belonging” produced by displacement (Said 1984:51, quoted in Rogoff 2000:99) is transformed. The performative inventions of memory, place and identity transform specific locales, audience engagements, and modes of knowledge. As such, performances are an important scale of analysis of national, transnational, and multicultural processes of identity—and performers’ and audiences’ engagements indicate the simultaneity of Palestinian diaspora and Canadian multicultural spaces.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

With the loss of Palestine and the dispersion of most Palestinians throughout the world, representational practices such as visual art, exhibition, and musical performances serve to reconstitute Palestinian identity.⁹³ Through art and performance, artists and audiences recreate belongings to the Palestinian collective identity—often through adopted cultural referents in multicultural contexts in the West. In this study I have tried to illustrate ways in which art and performance by Palestinians in Western diasporas represent ways in which Palestinians continue to reconstitute their attachment to places of memory and postmemory, enact belongings, and interpolate critical comment within dominant discourses.

The findings of this study indicate that Palestinian artists in exile are creating works and performances that are both unhomed and connected to memory and invention. The works and performances examined do not abide by a singular truth of culture or history. Official history is variously constituted through and deterritorialized by art and performance, which enact social, cultural, gender, class, generational, and religious identifications. The works and performances also attest to the fallacy of an immutable

⁹³ Notably, Palestine is also lost to those living in historic Palestine. That Palestinians live on the land that was Palestine does not refute, as Bowman notes, “their assertions that they are exiled from their homeland. For ‘homeland’ is itself a term already constituted within nationalist discourse; it is the place where the nationalist imagines his or her identity becoming fully realized. A domain where Palestinian identity is denied cannot be considered the Palestinian homeland, even if it were the very same ground on which they imagine the future Palestinian nation will be built” (Bowman 1994:139). As a result, in Sherwell’s words, “the land is not the

link between cultures, identities and specific places (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996:1). In artists' juxtaposing or conflating constructions of 'here' and 'there,' a deterritorialization is effected with regard to notions of bounded identity and culture, and a reterritorialization of place and subject is produced by the engagement of audiences in the movement between seemingly disparate cultural forms.

The research approach emanates from a conception of art as articulating as much with aesthetic styles and vocabularies as with transnational, transcultural, and historical relations of power. The war with Palestinians has been waged upon the land of Palestine, against the history of Palestinians, and on the spaces of individual bodies. While art works and performances by Palestinian artists are more than expressions of revolt, this study has examined ways in which art and performance reflect and create a range of aesthetic, individual and collective strategies in exile. I have focused on the performativity of artistic representations, that is, their efficacy in enacting identities and creating social spaces for individual and collective narratives.

I have argued that the art and performance looked at in this study variously reflect, shape, and enact memory, national narratives, cultural politics, postmemory, and belonging. The visual art examined in Chapter Three, the exhibition processes examined in Chapter Four, and musical performances looked at in Chapter Five illustrate different aspects of the performance of identities by Palestinians in Western multicultural contexts. The artists' works provide a means of articulating and imaging collective memories and postmemories which continue to invoke a shared sense of loss and

desired Palestine imaged in national rhetoric. Thus, the place remains in a constant dialectic of 'this is Palestine, but not Palestine'" (Sherwell 2003:327).

national identity. Each of the artists examined in the study is producing work that reflects and creates engagements with places and narratives of memory. Memories and postmemories are given artistic form in ways that manifest the unspeakable.

At the same time, the symbols of Palestinian national identity and historical memory are not stable referents. The meaning of images of dispossession, exile, struggle, injustice, trauma, and intimacy with the land change over time and in different contexts. Artists' works and exhibition processes point to the translocational, contingent, and critical use of images and national referents. Through exchanges with viewers and audiences, the bearings of collective Palestinian identity are mapped, and artists' and audiences' positionings imagined. As Sartre notes, "We must know how to say 'we' in order to say 'I'...But the opposite is also true. If some tyranny, in order to establish the 'we' first, deprives individuals of the subjective image, all 'interiority' disappears and all reciprocal relations with it" (Sartre 1960:35). Art variously creates as well as contests the 'I' as well as the social forces and discourses that shape collective identities—be they Palestinian identities in exile, or hyphenated Canadian-, American-, and British-Palestinian identities.

Artistic production and performance are means through which Palestinians recreate themselves through painful discontinuities. Artistic productions and performances by Palestinians in the West, like those of Palestinian writers, as noted by Slyomovics (1998:183), are neither purely 'political' nor 'personal.' Nor are they either purely collective or individual. Visual art, and performances of music and dance, suggest ways in which the formation of group identity is woven through the navigations of individual

identities (and the reverse). Art and performance also enable a 'play' with national identity. As Bowman rightly notes, "national identity is...a rhetorical device used by different persons and groups in different ways in different contexts for a multitude of ends; it is not in itself a particular form of nation-creating practice" (Bowman 1993:77). Imagery and performances serve to mobilize national identity in order to reshape and rename histories, memories, cultural forms, and political projects.

Works and performances by Palestinian artists in the West also serve to recast boundaries of self and other that are embedded in multicultural frameworks. Canadian writer Arun Mukherjee notes that an important role of literature by ethnic and racial minorities in Canada is to make the dominant and dominating culture self-conscious (Hutcheon 1991:49). Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen suggests that art also serves as an important model for addressing difference and social change:

The ability to be receptive and hospitable has characterised experimentation within visual art over the last 35 years...This ability to receive openly and experiment with hybrids is what is presently lacking within political discourse, where a multicultural synthesis is being destroyed by the rise of nationalism and right-wing ideologies...The way that visual art has been able to enhance aesthetic and ethical hospitality might present us with a very relevant perspective on the enormous transformations taking place right now across the world. One response to the developments currently shaping the world might then be to establish and strengthen a certain readiness in society by making it capable of thinking, researching and experiencing arrivals and expansions—that is, the arrival of foreign cultures and ideas and the expansion of the population and its sense of locality" (Rasmussen 2002:355).

The receptivity of art and the creation of audiences may serve, ultimately, to 'serve up' differences amongst Palestinians in ways that create shared milieus out-of-place, and that can eventually facilitate engagements with each other in a common, contiguous, territory and plural national entity. In the meantime, art creates equivalences between

Palestinians and between various audiences, by creating shared mobility between different modes of expression and cultural knowledges. For example, the often-reproduced map of Palestinian villages in the first decades of the 20th century (see Map 2.1), and Shammout's artistic rendering of the exodus (see Figure 2.1) resurface in Khamis' haunted witness to Deir Yassin (see Figure 3.13). Representing two conventions of knowledge and representation, the map can be taken to international courts of justice, while the images hover in imaginations to reinforce a collective sense of loss and identity.

The geographic displacement and dispersion of Palestinians renders their art a means of investigating issues of positionality and of who has the power and authority to subsume others into hegemonic identities. Art is an important means of "unhoming" geographies of identity and belonging and confronting coercive powers of the state to determine belonging (Rogoff 2000:4).⁹⁴ For Palestinian artists in the West, performing their art and enacting identifications take place within discourses and social narratives rarely of their own making (Somers 1994:606). As suggested in the preceding chapters, the art not only reflects and recreates "the perilous territory of not-belonging" that is a result of

⁹⁴ Two Israeli and Swedish artists created a piece of work that illustrates ways in which transgressions of national identifications are given social and political force through art. Their piece served to unhinge, or defamiliarize, official national Israeli discourses and suggest identifications with the 'other.' The work was entitled "Snow White and the Madness of Truth," and appeared in a recent exhibition at the Stockholm Museum. The artists are Dror Feiler, an Israeli who resides in Sweden, and Gunilla Skold Feiler, his Swedish wife. The work consisted of a basin of red water on which floated a boat carrying a portrait of a Palestinian woman, Hanadi Jaradat, who killed herself and others in an attack at a restaurant in Haiffa, Israel. The Israeli Ambassador to Sweden visited the exhibition and damaged the work, prompting the disruption of government relations between Sweden and Israel ("Israel's" 2004:np). Other works of art by Israeli artists include films such as "Yanoon Yanoon" (2004) which depicts Israeli military harassment of Palestinians. This film and works like it are, reportedly, seeking "to promote Israeli empathy for the other side and are increasingly moving into Israel's mainstream art scene, spurred by the intransigence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict" (Ackerman 2004:np).

displacement (Said 1984:51, quoted in Rogoff 2000:99). It is also an important aspect of social struggle. As a result, it is important to learn how to ‘read’ art as an engagement with mediated, constructed representations and discourses.

Bodies, like art, do not simply transmit an essence or purity of cultural experience. Rather, they shape cultural significations through aesthetic forms and confluences of power. Increasingly, cultural forms that ‘travel’ do so through the body and manifest in embodied practice and performance. Experiences of Palestinian culture—the gestures, the food, the customs and social milieu—are increasingly removed from those living in exile (Makdisi 1990). Perhaps because of this, the performing bodies of Palestinian artists are sites of cultural knowledge that reflect the movement of history and creations of belonging. Marks notes that “cultural knowledges are lost, found, and created anew in the temporal movement of history and in the spatial movement between places” (Marks 2000:24). The bodies of performing artists become fault lines, so to speak, between different modes of cultural knowledge. Through performance the musicians and their audiences, for example, create embodied modes of thought. Performance and spectatorship create and deploy cultural knowledge to transgress and regulate boundaries of the self and the other, as witnessed, for example, in Rania’s dance performance and her audiences responses.

The creative process itself remains a particularly important source of individual, social, and political regeneration—a regeneration that involves, in the words of Nonas, the “weaving and reweaving [of] outside hope into inside doubt” (Nonas 1994:165). Farouk

Kaspaules, a Chaldean Iraqi artist whose work was included in *Lands Within Me*,

remarks that for him the process of creating art:

is almost like a sacred process. It has discipline, spirituality if you want to use that word. There's something to me magical about it. You go through the process and the process is not easy. It's not hard, it's just a process. It accumulates its own conditions, its own world, its own milieu that you work within.⁹⁵

Differences are given language, bodily expression, validation, and social force through artistic expression. The works of visual artists examined in Chapter Three reflect and constitute different aspects of Palestinian experience and memory, and present viewers with different kinds of unease. Amin Shammout's images of the *nakba* reflect narratives of Palestinian dispossession and exile. Works by Zahi Khamis widen the narrative of Palestinian identity to include the trauma of dispossession and the symbolic meaning for Palestinians of the political and abstracted issues of negotiation between Palestinians and Israel. Works at the end of the trajectory, by Bashir Makhoul, 'play' with aesthetic form in a way that widens the narrative again to include relations of power between the West and the Middle East.

Art also provides for various re-engagements with the idea and force of 'an' originary home within and through places of exile and differences of age, generation, class, gender, culture, religion and so on. The memory of common suffering at the heart of Palestinian identity is reinvented and contemporised through art in a multitude of ways that assert its strategic and existential importance. In performance, as Marks reminds us, nostalgia "need not mean an immobilising longing for a lost past: it can also mean the

⁹⁵ Personal interview, 7 May, 1999.

ability of past experiences to transform the present” (Marks 2000:201). As with intercultural cinema, visual art and musical performance, I suggest, can “activate inert presences, such as historical archives and fetish objects, and make them volatile so that they intervene in the present” (Marks 2000:201). Said notes, in *After the Last Sky*, that “memory adds to the unrelieved intensity of Palestinian exile” (Said 1986:12). The art works examined in this study suggest that the intensity of memory is, in part, relieved in its recreation within art as a form of witness. Works and performance render the intensity of memory, and the forgetting that is integral to the expression of memory, witness against the ravages of history and forgetfulness (Muhawi 1995:xix). Art serves to “join” intensities of cultural memory to aesthetic vocabularies in particular locales to create a shared “unease” (Nonas 1994:165).

While categories of multiculturalism entrench group identities, this study illustrates the performative and contingent nature of identity. Differences amongst the Palestinian artists are underlined by and created through the cascade of variation in style, content, form, and strategies of works and performances. For example, Nicola takes on the burden of memory to defend his heritage against Israeli usurpation and also to “go through the wall” of Western ignorance of Arabic art forms. Makhoul’s use of Western abstract forms serves to paint the antagonist as both Israel and the West. Processes of exhibition and cultural politics examined in Chapter Four underline the stakes involved in representations. As that chapter illustrated, the Canadian Museum of Civilization’s desire to add context to the exhibit of Arab Canadian artists was an attempt to erase the museum’s own subjectivity and explain ‘them’ (Arab Canadian artists and Arab Canadians as a community). At stake were, ultimately, boundaries of “Canadian”

identity, as well as the geopolitics of Canadian multiculturalism and foreign policy. The defence of the art works as “just art” served to inscribe both the works and the artists with ‘cultural’ rather than ‘political’ significance—recreating a divide between art and politics.

The art in the exhibit, as well as that of the Palestinian artists examined in Chapter Three and the performances of the musicians discussed in Chapter Five recast nationalist Palestinian imagery to perform an unease of injustice. Palestinian artists and performers in Canada also deploy symbols, imagery, and strategies that serve to hybridize Canadianness. Art and performance, importantly, create spaces for pain, anger and resentments that are otherwise cast as contrary to the “Canadian values” that are so pervasively and euphemistically espoused within dominant discourses of Canadian multiculturalism. Cross-cultural spectatorship, as this study has illustrated, “is not simply a utopian exchange between communities, but a dialogue deeply embedded in the asymmetries of power” (Shohat and Stam 1994:355).

6.1 Art and multiculturalism

Part of what embeds asymmetries between “Canadian Canadians” and Arab or Palestinian Canadians is the Eurocentric framework of official multiculturalism. In practice, as the cultural politics surrounding the *Lands Within Me* exhibit brought to the surface, multiculturalism has become a focus of debates and discussion of the terms by which groups and identities struggle for representation and integration into the wider society. But the policy origins, debates, and shortcomings of multiculturalism in Canada

believe a Eurocentric framework that renders problematic seemingly benign notions such as ‘tolerance.’ I suggest that Ella Shohat and Robert Stam’s important conceptualization of radical, polycentric multiculturalism is a vital way forward.

The term multiculturalism was coined in Canada in the 1970s in reference to federal government policy papers, though refers to a variety of practices and policy that differ across countries (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002:121). Multicultural policy in Canada is couched within a bilingual framework that reflects the continued domination of British- and, to a lesser extent French-origin groups (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002:108). There was no coherent theory underlying the policy when it was first instituted. Rather, as Canadian philosopher Will Kymlicka notes, it was a way of deflecting criticism of the privileging of French and English in the establishment of official bilingualism (Kymlicka 1998:40).

In its early incarnation, multiculturalism aimed to support cultural maintenance of ethnocultural groups, remove cultural barriers to full participation in Canadian society, promote cultural interchange, and provide language training in English or French to immigrants. In its first decade, funding was provided primarily for ‘folklore’ activities such as dance troupes and theatre and, to a lesser extent, “heritage language” training (training in the language of one’s heritage) (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002:108). In the late 1980s, Mulroney’s Conservative government formalized the policy and also linked it to business interests. The subsequent Chretien Liberals further cast it as a tool of prosperity in an increasingly globalized international economy, with diversity seen as a means of enhancing business prosperity, international trade links and Canada’s global

competitiveness. The emphasis shifted from inclusion and belonging to national and international competitiveness (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002:110-11, 124).

Early criticism of the policy centred around its “song and dance” aspect and its failure to transform power relations. Its focus on ethnic groups was seen to assume an internal homogeneity within communities and served to disregard gender, class and other differences (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002:108-109). More recently, Neil Bissoondath’s *Selling Illusions* puts forward a critique of multiculturalism that is insightful but problematic. Bissoondath provides a compelling summary of some of the assumptions underlying multicultural policy in Canada. He notes that it assumes,

that people, coming here from elsewhere, wish to remain what they have been; that personalities and ways of doing things, ways of looking at the world, can be frozen in time; that Canadian cultural influences pale before the exoticism of the foreign. It views newcomers as exotics, and pretends that this is both proper and sufficient (Bissoondath 1998:43).

Nonetheless, Bissoondath’s criticism falls firmly within a neo-conservative framework and fails to problematize gender, class and other differences. His conclusion, that ethnic identity should be a matter of private choice and not public policy, discounts the silencing and marginalization of those who are marked by difference from the dominant (British and French) norm. As political scientists Yasmeen Abu-Laban and Christina Gabriel rightly note, since the state is not neutral in matters of culture, the notion that cultural maintenance should be left to private choice promotes a ‘belonging to the nation’ that favours the dominant (British and French) groups (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002:124). Abu-Laban and Gabriel rightly contend that the linking of multiculturalism to the goal of enhancing business and trade opportunities, serves to place greater value

on the male entrepreneur and increase gender and class inequalities among ethnic minorities (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002:124).

Another perceived shortcoming of multiculturalism is its binary of a visible/invisible populace that entrenches difference by racializing divisions between people and hinders the self-naming of identities (Synnott and Howes, 1998: 138). Multiculturalism is also charged with the commodification of ethnic cultures and histories through multicultural festivals that feature the food and dance of ethnic groups. On the other side of this argument, Kymlicka asserts that it is capitalism and not multiculturalism that produces the fetishization of culture in the form of ethnic festivals—the proliferation of such festivals in the United States where no policy of multiculturalism exists is seen as a case in point (Kymlicka 1998:46).

Whether it is multiculturalism or capitalism that produces the commodification and fetishization of ethnic cultures and histories, debate in Canada largely fails to address the underlying Eurocentrism of the policy. It is this Eurocentric framework which casts ethnic groups as Other and entreats the British/French core center to be “tolerant” of minorities. The notion of tolerance has not been taken up rigorously within debates of multiculturalism in Canada, but Ghassan Hage’s analysis of multiculturalism in the Ausatralian context is instructive.

Evidently, the practices of tolerance, like the practices of intolerance and exclusion, are nationalist practices employed in the management of national space (Hage 1998:95).

Hage argues that, “there is no tolerant nationalism and intolerant nationalism. Both are

about realising a vision of national space through tolerance and intolerance, through the exclusion of some and the inclusion of others”(Hage 1998:93). Hage suggests that the power of the intolerant is reasserted by the very request not to exercise it: “Those interpellated by the discourse of tolerance see in the very address a confirmation of their power to be intolerant” (Hage 1998:86-87).

Multicultural tolerance is not, then, a good policy that happens to be limited in its scope. I confer with Hage’s argument that it is, rather, “a strategy aimed at reproducing and disguising relationships of power in society, or being reproduced through that disguise. It is a form of symbolic violence in which a mode of domination is presented as a form of egalitarianism” (Hage 1998:87). The symbolic violence of multiculturalism derives from the fact that it rests on deeply embedded Orientalist and Eurocentric assumptions. Eurocentrism is a mode of thought comprised of intellectual tendencies such as a lineal historical trajectory emanating from Ancient Greece to the metropolitan capitals of Europe and America. While sanitizing Western history, Eurocentrism demonizes the non-West (Shohat and Stam 1994:2-3). To quote at length, Shohat and Stam elaborate that:

Eurocentrism is a form of vestigial thinking which permeates and structures contemporary practices and representations even after the formal end of colonialism. Although colonialist discourse and Eurocentric discourse are intimately intertwined, the terms have a distinct emphasis. While the former explicitly justifies colonialist practices, the latter embeds, takes for granted, and “normalizes” the hierarchical power relations generated by colonialism and imperialism without necessarily even thematizing those issues directly. Although generated by the colonizing process, Eurocentrism’s links to that process are obscured in a kind of buried epistemology (Shohat and Stam 1994:2).

Because the cultures included in multicultural lexicons have not historically coexisted in relations of equality and mutual respect, a substantive multiculturalism would have to recognize the existential realities of pain, anger, and resentment of so-called minority groups (Shohat and Stam 1994:358-59). The process of communicating across borders has to also involve the discerning of the forces that generate the borders in the first place. In this process, not only difference but also bitter and irreconcilable difference has to be recognized (Shohat and Stam 1994:359).

Shohat and Stem instructively distinguish between liberal pluralism which is tainted by its historical links with slavery, the inequalities of conquest, and exploitation, and a relational and radical polycentric multiculturalism. Their notion of polycentrism is one that globalizes multiculturalism: "It envisions a restructuring of intercommunal relations within and beyond the nation-state according to the internal imperatives of diverse communities" (Shohat and Stam 1994:48). Within this framework, no community or part of the world is privileged, and instead of one or multiple centers of power, relationality and linkages are fostered (Shohat and Stam 1994:49). "Other" voices are not benevolently tolerated. Rather, marginalized communities are seen "as active, generative participants at the very core of a shared conflictual history" (Shohat and Stam 1994:48).

Politicians and curators, sometimes with too much facile, champion joint Palestinian and Israeli exhibitions for which there is considerable funding "as though," in Sherwell's words, "the juxtaposition of art objects signifies co-existence and peace between two peoples" (Sherwell 2003:61-62). Nonetheless, there is important work to

be done in translating ‘each side’ to the other, and the realm of culture is particularly vital in enabling an identification with the ‘other.’ The Palestinian narrative of dispossession and exile during the *nekba* remains largely unknown to Israelis, despite (as outlined in Chapter Two) their joint histories. The fact that works of art and performances by Palestinians continue to try to create languages and discursive spaces for the Palestinian narrative, makes art an important interlocutor. The question of whether and what sort of cultural exchange between Israelis and Palestinians is a matter, understandably, of significant debate amongst Palestinians.

6.2 A note on the trajectory as a heuristic structure

The heuristic structure of a trajectory which organizes the analysis of Chapter Three is useful, as illustrated, in connecting the works to different historical imperatives, artists biographical trajectories, narratives of Palestinian identity, and the discursive contexts in which the art is performed. Indeed, the trajectory is as much about audiences and contexts as it is about the works themselves. The trajectory is employed in Chapter Three as an organizing framework and does not imply that the artists’ productions remain static in their development. Rather, artists’ bodies of work reflect continual change, reflection, incorporation and evolution of style, materials, and subject matter. The works themselves and the audiences that engage with them, as I have tried to illustrate, give expression to narratives, structures of feeling, social distinctions, national struggles, and personal memories that elaborate several aspects of Palestinian identity—such as the *nekba*, the social and political struggle against occupation, the psychological costs born by successive generations in exile, and the embracing of ‘foreign’ forms and languages of expression. These four aspects are by no means mutually exclusive.

Rather, most of the works of art reflect all of them. Moreover, these aspects of Palestinian visual art reflect the amorphous, dynamic, contingent, political, and ‘impure’ nature of Palestinian cultural expressions. As much can be said of identity itself.

Another point with regard to the trajectory is its implied lineal nature. As mentioned in Chapter One, there is no implied progression or normative development from a certain style or subject matter of art to another. Indeed, themes re-emerge in different works along the trajectory. Further, their re-emergence within different styles of visual art infuses them with different narrative efficacy.

6.3 Contribution of the study to geographic analyses and directions for further research

The findings of the study confirm that art is a “useful interlocutor” (Rogoff 2000) in examining the ways in which identity is constituted through the discontinuities of time and space. It has drawn together critical approaches to the study of art and identity, and has connected several scales of analysis. The research contributes understandings of the interaction of between belonging and places of exile. I believe the research contributes a more textured understanding of ways in which both art and identities are constituted through institutional, transnational, transcultural, aesthetic, bodily, discursive and social processes. The research also contributes understandings of the role of art in struggles for self-ascription within multicultural frameworks—that is, within Canada, which has explicit multicultural policies, and amongst Palestinians who have multiple cultural belongings. The study reinforces, I believe, the epistemological importance of art as a “model for the difficulty of grasping and fixing meaning” (Bal 1996:281).

This study points to the cultural vitality of the Palestinian diaspora, and flags the strategic importance of the Palestinian diaspora in both cultural and political realms. Further research would be fruitful into ways in which art and performance by Palestinians and other artists challenge terms of cultural and political engagement within various multicultural contexts. It would be useful to examine the increasing number of exhibits that feature art by Palestinians in North America and Europe along with their contemporaries from Palestine or Israel. Further study is also needed on the ways in which Palestinians and their supporters are making inroads in contesting dominant narratives in the West. Comparative studies of other anti-colonial struggles would also be fruitful. It is also important, I believe, to better understand the implications for the Palestinians of increasing globalization and Israeli occupation measures.

While various agreements would seem to portend better prospects for Palestinian national rights and regional peace, developments 'on the ground' point to increasing insecurity and alienation. The effects of Israeli actions, such as its unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, prolonged closures of the West Bank and Gaza which prevent the movement of Palestinians between and within the West Bank and Gaza, the wall being constructed around and in the West Bank, and the continued usurpation of Palestinian land and rights has a profound effect on day to day life for Palestinians. One effect has been the further alienation of Palestinians from their lands, livelihoods, and families. The effect of these developments on cultural production is important to examine. Sherwell notes that with the arrival of the Palestinian National Authority and the Palestine Liberation

Organization in the West Bank and Gaza, the role of safeguarding national symbols has shifted somewhat from artists to the national authority (Sherwell 2003:341). Further study of the role of art and cultural productions would provide insight into the ways in which Palestinians are managing to maintain and regenerate the social fabric of various Palestinian communities.

It would also be useful to examine the effect of the internet on shaping both attachments to landscapes, as well as collective strategies to maintain connections amongst Palestinians separated by geography and generation. Attachment to place is being recast through languages of art and, as Catherine Nash notes in relation to Irish artists, “the rejection of fixed conceptions of identity and place, and their racist and patriarchal use, does not mean that landscape is a redundant or inherently tainted symbol. It does not invalidate attachment to place” (Nash 1994:243). Shala’s website and a recent proliferation of sites devoted to Palestinian art, culture, and oral histories attest to the importance of the internet in extending narratives and transmitting memories from parents and grandparents to children. Examining these processes amongst Palestinians would help to better understand identity with reference to the deterritorialization of places—of both memory and exile.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED AND CONCERTS ATTENDED

Interviews with visual artists:

Mahmoud Gharib, painter and sketcher, Palestinian origin, living in Mississauga, Ontario

Interviewed at his home

September 1999

Abdul Hadi Shala, painter, Palestinian origin, living in Mississauga, Ontario

Interviewed at his home

September 1999

Bashir Makhoul, multimedia artist, Palestinian origin, living in Liverpool, England

Interviewed on the occasion of a talk he gave at his exhibit, *Hold*, held at Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool

26 February 2000

Amin Shammout, painter, Palestinian origin, living in Halifax

Brief interview at an exhibit of his works, *Amin Shammout*, at Pier 21, Halifax,

December 22, 2000

Follow-up interview at his home, March 12 2002

Zahi Khamis, painter, Palestinian origin, living in Baltimore, Maryland

Telephone interview from Ottawa to his home, 28 November, 2003

Hana Albadri, painter, Palestinian origin, living in Beaconsfield, Quebec

Interviewed in her home, 5 September 1999

Jamal Gharbia, painter, Palestinian origin, living in Mississauga, Ontario

Interviewed at his home, September 1999

Kamal Boullata, mixed media artist, Palestinian origin, living in France

Written correspondence in 1999

Artists whose works are included in *The Lands Within Me: Artistic Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin*, exhibit at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, 18 October 2001 – 8 March 2003.

Sami Zubi, mixed media artist, Palestinian origin, living in Ottawa

Interviewed at his home, 10 March 1999

Follow-up interview by telephone on 1 Dec 2003

Faruk Kaspaules, mixed media artist, Iraqi origin, living in Ottawa

Two indepth interviews that lasted several hours each, at his studio, 7th and 13th May 1999

Camille Zakharia, mixed media artist, Lebanese origin, living in Montreal
Interviewed at a café in Ottawa, 10 June 1999

Nihal Mazloum, jewelry artist, Egyptian origin, living in Montreal
Interviewed at her home in Montreal, 1 July 1999

Bernice Lutfie Sorge, painter, Armenian origin, living in Dunham, Quebec
Telephone conversation, June 1999

John Asfour, writer, Lebanese origin, living in Montreal
Two interviews at his home, 1 July 1999, 7 September 1999

Wasmaa Chorbachi, ceramic artist, Iraqi origin, living in the U.S.
Interviewed at a restaurant in Washington, D.C., 7 April 1999

Interviews with musicians:

Rania [pseudonym], dancer and musician, Palestinian origin, living in Toronto
Interviewed at Chez Eric restaurant in Wakefield, Quebec, following her concert with her Band, Doula
11 April 1999

Camilla [pseudonym], musician and singer, Palestinian origin, living in Montreal
Telephone interview and follow-up conversations, 7-20 February 1999
Interviewed at her home recording studio, 12 March 1999

Nicolas [pseudonym], musician and singer, Palestinian origin, living in Ottawa at the time of interview
Interviewed twice at his home
11 June 1999, 7 July 1999

Interviews with curators:

Aida Kaouk, Curator of *The Lands Within Me: Artistic Expressions of Canadian Artists of Arab Origin*
Interviewed 9 June 1999

Constance Nebel, Assistant Curator of *The Lands Within Me: Artistic Expressions of Canadian Artists of Arab Origin*
Interviewed 19 January 1999; in addition to several conversations and exchanges of correspondence between December 1997 and July 1999

On-the-spot interviews conducted with visitors at:

Mona Hatoum

Retrospective exhibit, *Mona Hatoum*, at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, 1 August – 25 October 1998

Artists Against the Occupation

MAI (Montreal art interculturelles), Montreal

31 October 2003

Discussion with curator; analysis of visitors' comments in guestbook

Amin Shammout

Pier 21, Halifax

1-31 December, 2000

Multicultural Day

Halifax, March 2002

The Lands Within Me: Artistic Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin

Canadian Museum of Civilization

18 October 2001 – 8 March 2003

Selected concerts attended:

Camilla, Vanier College, following a screening of BBC film of Edward Said's return trip to Palestine/Israel. Montreal, 6 February 1999

Camilla, Café Campus, Montreal, 19 February 1999

Camilla, Multicultural performance, Ottawa, 14 May 1999

Camilla, CEPAL fundraiser, Ottawa, 6 June 1999

Rania, with her 3 piece band, Black Sheep Inn, Wakefield, Quebec 11 April 1999

Rania, with her 3-piece band, music and dance performance, Opening Ceremonies for *The Lands Within Me: Artistic Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin*, 18 October, 2001.

Rania, with her 12-piece band, Harbour Front, Toronto, October, 2000.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following list of questions was drawn up prior to fieldwork and was used as a guide in interviews with visual artists, musicians, and curators. Further questions emerged as research progressed.

On art:

- What materials are used in the art?
- What are the components of the image?
- How are they arranged?
- Where is the viewer's eye drawn and what is the gaze which is created?
- What use is made of colour?
- Is there Arabic script/English text in the piece?
- What is the relationship between the text and the image?
- What images are in the art? What are their possible symbolic meanings?
- How are symbols gendered?
- Where does the image 'fit' in relation to the body of work produced by Palestinian artists?
- What artistic conventions are employed?
- What is the relationship of artistic conventions to other cultural forms and how do these articulate with each other within the image?
- How are predominant and dominant cultural references used? How are they juxtaposed and to what effect?
- When was the art made?
- Where was it made?
- Was it produced for a specific exhibit/audience?
- Where has the work been displayed? Where is the work situated in relation to the artist's body of work, use of materials? Is the piece one of a series?
- What is the social identity of the artist, the owner of the art, and the subject of the image/text?
- What equipment or technologies were used to make the art?
- What government or private institutional support was provided to the artist/the exhibit?
- Is the 'voice' of the art positioned strategically by the artist or exhibit?
- What national ideologies/aspirations is it engaged with? Is the art in dialogue with official national discourses of culture or, alternatively, with countering discourses?
- Is the artist consciously engaging with these discourses?
- What does the artist intend the materials meant to evoke?
- What aesthetic styles and vocabularies are reflected in the work?
- Does abstraction have the breadth and ability to convey the moods, ideas, and strategies of Palestinian painters?
- What theories of art and languages of art criticism is the image produced in reference to?

Is a male/female, elite/local, subject/Other, Palestinian/Diasporic, Canadian(British)/Other gaze produced or contested in the image?
 Are discourses of loss and exile reflected in the image?
 What identities or subjectivities are articulated through the image?
 How much is the art in dialogue with discourses of Islamic, pan-Arab, or nationalist movements and how much is it in dialogue with local or national socio-cultural processes within Canada or the UK?
 Is the art in dialogue in relation to other Western-situated diasporic groups, issues, struggles?

On artists' subjectivities:

Is the artist 'reading' the museum's potential and constraints, as well as the social contradictions it serves to maintain?
 Is the artist attempting to contribute to the language/processes of individual or national identity?
 What cultural forms does the artist draw upon?
 What communities is the artist working within?
 Is the artist internationally or nationally known? Is making art the artist's primary occupation?
 What is the artist's contact with historic Palestine and how is this contact mediated through his or her art production and exhibition? What is the artist's view of identity and its role in his/her art?
 Is the artist playing with conventional boundaries of cultural markers in the symbolism employed or materials used?
 Who and what are the influences on the artist's work?
 Does the art represent, for the artist and viewers, an attempt to resist the effacement of Palestinian history/culture/identity?
 Does it represent reinvention, that is, an attempt to create alternative ways of conceiving Palestinian history/culture/identity?
 How does the artist experience the pull of the political and economic imperatives of nationalism and how does this experience translate into their art?
 Does the artist attempt to enter into the discourses of the West, "to voyage in," in Edward Said's term, and mix with and transform Western aesthetic styles or discourses toward making the marginalised or suppressed histories acknowledged?

Museum and exhibition discourses and processes:

What discourses of the museum, exhibit, national culture/art, the nation, Arabs, Palestinians, 'ethnic groups,' multiculturalism, immigration, etc., form the context of the exhibit?
 Where is the gallery located?
 What does the art/installation demand from the audience?
 Does the museum encourage the viewer to understand aesthetic categories as historical categories, and a piece of work as a statement about its place in society and the time in which it was created?
 What labels and documentation accompany the work?
 What kind of viewing does the layout encourage?

What social identities are constituted and which remain silent on the part of the artists and audiences?

What kind of audience does the gallery hope to attract? Who is the viewing audience?

Does the exhibition attract an audience-for-art or an audience-for-national-culture? How does the curator/gallery navigate between (or reproduce) the distinction between these?

What is the critical reception of the art?

What is the nature and content of media coverage of the art?

How is the artist and art framed in the media?

What notions and categories (folk, national, abstract, foreign, etc.) of art and "regimes of visibility" (bell hooks 1995) come into play in the design of the exhibition?

On the creation of audiences and audience engagement:

What meanings and perspectives are brought to the art by the viewers?

What do they 'go away with'?

How far have they travelled to view the art? What is the place of art in their lives? What is their connection to the artist/gallery/city/country?

What is the public/critics' response to the art and how is this expressed/produced?